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A · DRAMATIC · POEM · BY · RICHARD
WAGNER · FREELY · TRANSLATED · IN
POETIC · NARRATIVE · FORM · BY

Oliver · Huckel



Thomas · P · Crowell · & · Co ·
PUBLISHERS · NEW · YORK

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FOREWORD



HERE is something primitive, colossal, majestic in Wagner's fourfold music drama of *The Nibelungen Ring*. It partakes of the power and grandeur of the earlier ages of the world. It is a drama of the mighty era of the gods, the giants, and the heroes before the coming of man upon the earth. It is the wondrous story in which was enwrapped much of the religious belief of our ancient Northern ancestors in Europe.

The deepest truths of this drama of primitive life are universal, and their meanings as potent to-day as in the prehistoric world. It is a vast allegory of the strongest passions of life. It is a dream of yesterday and a vision of to-morrow, if we have eyes to look into the heart of its mystery.

It is the aim of this present translation and interpretation to present the story of *The Ring* in the clear and strong way of the German original, to show the relation of the parts and the dramatic unity of the whole, to make the whole vast epic stand out in its own vivid light and thrilling power.

The usual English librettos of *The Ring* are totally inadequate and confusing as translations of Wagner's text. They are made to suit the musical requirements rather than to present the thought in literary form. It is often a perplexing task rather than a pleasure to read them. Tenfold more involved and obscure than Browning, they have none of his redeeming grace of thought or speech.

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The present translation aims to be faithful to Wagner's text, and at the same time clear in thought, poetic in imagery, rhythmic in expression. It endeavors to transfuse into English the very spirit of Wagner's lofty thought.

It will be remembered that Wagner wrote *The Nibelungen Ring*, first of all, merely as a poem, and so it was originally published. The music was not composed until a later period. Some parts of the published poem he did not use for the music, and they are not given in the librettos, — for instance, Brunnhilda's splendid farewell words in *The Dusk of the Gods*, — but we have used them in this translation as being a real part of the poem, and as a fine inspiration for the interpretation of the fullest thought of the drama.

The Nibelungen Ring, as Wagner gives it, is divided into four dramas, — *The Rhine-Gold*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Dusk of the Gods*. These are a tetralogy, a cycle of four great music dramas, or, as it is sometimes designated, a trilogy, considering *The Rhine-Gold* as a prelude to the greater story of *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Dusk of the Gods*.

In these introductory words we may find it helpful toward a clear understanding to consider the four dramas as one great epic whole, — for such they are, — and to study the sources of the story, the story itself, and finally its spiritual and universal significance. In doing this each one of the dramas will be studied in some detail, the special features noted, the unusual references explained, and the dramatic scope

and purpose considered. Wagner's part in the remarkable welding into unity will then be clearly seen. **Fore-
word**

I

As to the sources, we may remember that *The Ring*, as we have it in Wagner's dramas, is not taken from the ancient *Nibelungen Lied*, to which it bears some resemblance, but it is an independent composition. It was derived by Wagner from various ancient songs and sagas, composed by many old bards, and Wagner wove it into one great harmonious story. Its main features, and also innumerable details, are from the old Norse and German myths, but there has been selection and rearrangement of the material. The principal source of *The Ring* was the *Volsunga Saga*, a Scandinavian epic, preserved in the Icelandic literature. Lesser parts of the story are taken from the *Elder Edda* and the *Younger Edda*, old Norse sagas. Other parts are taken from the *Nibelungen Lied*, the *Eckenlied*, and other Teutonic folklore.

The great drama, as Wagner finally evolved it, is wonderfully true to the ancient spirit, and gives a splendid glimpse into the earlier mythology and legends of the Northern peoples. In the drama of *The Ring* there is portrayed a primitive existence in the world, and at first there are only four distinct races,—the gods, the giants, the dwarfs, the nymphs. Later, by a special creation, there come two other races,—the valkyrie and the heroes. As to the characterization of these races, we may note that

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the gods are the noblest and highest race, and dwell first in the mountain meadows, later in the palace of Valhalla on the heights. The giants are a great and strong race, but lack wisdom; they hate what is noble, and are enemies of the gods; they dwell in caves near the earth's surface. The dwarfs, or nibelungs, are black, uncouth pigmies, hating the good, hating the gods; they are crafty and cunning, and dwell in the bowels of the earth. The nymphs are pure, innocent creatures of the water. The valkyrie are daughters of the gods, but mingled with a mortal strain; they gather dead heroes from the battle-fields and carry them to Valhalla. The heroes are children of the gods, but also mingled with a mortal strain; they are destined to become at last the highest race of all, and to succeed the gods in the government of the world.

The principal gods are Wotan, the first of the gods; Loki, the god of fire; Donner, the god of thunder; Froh, the god of joy. The goddesses are Fricka, wife of Wotan and goddess of marriage; Freya, the goddess of love; Erda, the goddess of earth. The chief giants are Fafner and Fasolt, brothers. The chief dwarfs are Alberich and Mime, brothers, and later Hagan, son of Alberich. The chief nymphs are the Rhine-daughters, Flosshilda, Woglinda, and Wellgunda. There are nine Valkyrie, of whom Brunnhilda is the leading one. The most important relationship to remember is that of Brunnhilda and Siegfried. Brunnhilda is the daughter of Wotan and Erda. Siegfried is the son

of Siegmund and Sieglinda, both of whom are children of Wotan by a mortal woman. The drama culminates with the slaying of Siegfried and the sacrificial death of Brunnhilda.

There are many magical elements in the drama of *The Ring*, such as the ring itself, which endows its owner with supernatural power and ensures the obedience of others to his commands; the tarnhelm, or wishing-cap, which enables its owner to become invisible, or to assume any form he pleases; the sword, which has magic power, given by Wotan; the golden apples that grow in the garden of the goddess Freya, and impart eternal youth to all who eat them; the draught of oblivion, which effaces memory; the draught of memory, which restores it; the bird which speaks to Siegfried and leads him; the dragon into which Fafner transforms himself; the dragon's blood, which enables Siegfried to understand the language of birds; the fire which springs up around the sleeping Brunnhilda at the command of the fire-god Loki. It is well to have these relations and symbols clearly in mind in reading the successive parts of the drama. It will be a blazed path through the mazes and intricacies of the forest.

II

Those who wish to study the differences in the legends of the *Nibelungen Lied* and the *Nibelungen Ring*, and the way in which Wagner used his ancient material, are referred to Professor W. C. Sawyer's book on *Teutonic Legends*

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in the Nibelungen Lied and the Nibelungen Ring, where the matter is treated in full detail. For a very thorough and clear analysis of The Ring as Wagner gives it, with a study of the musical motifs, probably nothing is better for general readers than the volume *The Epic of Sounds*, by Freda Winworth. The more scholarly work of Professor Lavignac is indispensable for the student of Wagner's dramas. There is much illuminating comment on the sources and materials in *Legends of the Wagner Drama* by J. L. Weston. One of the best literary appreciations of the ancient legends is the essay by Thomas Carlyle, under the title of the Nibelungen Ring. That stern old prophet and wonderful prose-poet was a lover of German literature and especially of this great drama of The Ring.

As to the argument of the story, it will also be best to get that clearly in mind as a whole before going into the details of the various parts. It will save much confusion.

In brief the whole story of The Ring is this: The Rhine-Gold tells how a hoard of gold exists in the depths of the Rhine, guarded by the innocent Rhine-maidens. Alberich, a dwarf, forswears love to gain this gold. He makes it into a magic ring. It gives him all power. He gathers by it a hoard of treasures. Meanwhile Wotan, chief of the gods, has engaged the giants to build for him a noble castle, Valhalla, from whence to rule the world. They build it and come for payment. He had promised to give to them Freya, goddess of youth and love. But now the gods find they cannot spare Freya, up-

on whom they depend for their immortal youth. Loki, the god of fire and god of cunning craft as well, must provide some substitute. He tells of Alberich's magic ring and other treasure. The giants agree to take this. Wotan goes with Loki, and they steal it from Alberich, who curses them and lays the curse upon all who shall henceforth possess it. On compulsion they give the magic ring and the treasures to the giants as a substitute for Freya. The curse begins. Fafner kills his brother to get all, and transforms himself into a dragon to guard the treasures and the ring. The gods enter Valhalla over the rainbow bridge.

The second part of the drama, called the Valkyrie, relates how Wotan still covets the ring. He cannot take it himself, for he has given his word to the giants. He stands or falls by his word. So he devises an artifice to get the ring. He will get a hero-race to work for him and recover the ring and the treasures. Siegmund and Sieglinda are twin children of this new race. Sieglinda is carried off as a child and is forced into marriage with Hunding. Siegmund comes, and unknowingly breaks the law of marriage, but wins Nothung, the great sword, and a bride. Brunnhilda, chief of the Valkyrie, is commissioned by Wotan at the instance of Fricka, goddess of marriage, to slay him for his sin. She disobeys and tries to save him, but Hunding, helped by Wotan, slays him. Sieglinda, however, about to bear the free hero, to be called Siegfried, is saved by Brunnhilda, and hid in the forest. Brunnhilda herself is punished by

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being made a mortal woman. She is left sleeping on the mountains with a wall of fire around her which only a hero can penetrate.

The drama continues. The story of Siegfried opens with a scene in the smithy between Mime the dwarf and Siegfried. Mime is welding a sword, and Siegfried scorns him. Mime tells him something of his mother, Sieglinda, and shows him the broken pieces of his father's sword. Wotan comes and tells Mime that only one who has no fear can remake the sword. Now Siegfried knows no fear and soon remakes the sword Nothung. Wotan and Alberich come to where the dragon Fafner is guarding the ring. They both long for it, but neither can take it. Soon Mime comes bringing Siegfried with the mighty sword. Fafner comes out, but Siegfried slays him. Happening to touch his lips with the dragon's blood, he understands the language of the birds. They tell him of the ring. He goes and gets it. Siegfried now has possession of the ring, but it is to bring him nothing of happiness, only evil. It is to curse love and finally bring death. The birds also tell him of Mime's treachery. He slays Mime. He longs for some one to love. The birds tell him of the slumbering Brunnhilda. A little bird leads him on the way. Wotan, who has taken last counsel of Erda, opposes him and tests him, but sees that he is the true hero at last. Siegfried finds Brunnhilda, loves her, awakens her; she in bewilderment and joy gives herself to him, and the supreme lovers of the world find love's victory and love's ecstasy.

The Dusk of the Gods portrays at the opening the three norns or fates weaving and measuring the thread of destiny. It is the beginning of the end. The perfect pair, Siegfried and Brunnhilda, appear in all the glory of their life, splendid ideals of manhood and womanhood. But Siegfried goes out into the world to achieve deeds of prowess. He gives her the Nibelungen ring to keep as a pledge of his love till his return. Meanwhile Alberich also has begotten a son, Hagan, to achieve for him the possession of the ring. He is partly of the Gibichung race, and works through Gunther and Gutrune, half-brother and half-sister to him. They beguile Siegfried to them, give him a magic draught which makes him forget Brunnhilda and fall in love with Gutrune. Under this same spell, he offers to bring Brunnhilda for wife to Gunther. Now is Valhalla full of sorrow and despair. The gods fear the end. Wotan murmurs, "O that she would give back the ring to the Rhine." But Brunnhilda will not give it up,—it is now her pledge of love. Siegfried comes, takes the ring, and Brunnhilda is now brought to the Rhine castle of the Gibichungs, but Siegfried under the spell does not love her. She is to be wedded to Gunther. She rises in wrath and denounces Siegfried. But at a hunting banquet Siegfried is given another magic draught, remembers all, and is slain by Hagan by a blow in the back, as he calls on Brunnhilda's name in love. Then comes the end. The body of Siegfried is burned on a funeral pyre, a grand funeral march is heard, and Brunnhilda rides into the flames

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and sacrifices herself for love's sake; the ring goes back to the Rhine-daughters; and the old world — of the gods and Valhalla, of passion and sin — is burnt up with flames, for the gods have broken moral law, and coveted power rather than love, gold rather than truth, and therefore must perish. They pass, and a new era, the reign of love and truth, has begun.

III

And now looking at the real significance of the drama, we may take *The Nibelungen Ring* in one of three ways. We may consider it merely as a retelling in splendid form of some of the greatest of the ancient legends of the Norse mythology. It then becomes a national epic of the Northern peoples, as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the great epics of the Southern peoples. It is a great story, such as the childhood of the race loves. It is a mighty picture, or series of pictures, full of beauty, passion, pathos, tragedy, majesty. It has no hidden meanings. It is just a world-old legend that grew up in the poetic imagination of the people, or a legend, cycle that developed around some ancient historic events.

Or we may take it as an ancient story rearranged by Richard Wagner to teach social and political lessons. In this view it is a great allegory of the political life of Europe in Wagner's day. It is a socialistic pamphlet, written in splendid poetic imagery. Such is Mr. Bernard Shaw's interpretation, in his book called *The*

Perfect Wagnerite. We may remember in this connection that Wagner was political revolutionist and socialistic philosopher, as well as poet and musician.

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This view that *The Ring* is a drama of modern labor gives it an intensely vivid and contemporaneous interest. Against the background of the gods the mighty play is worked out, — the tyranny of capital, the swarming masses of the working-people, and the great ethical principles involved in the struggle are wonderfully shown. Here are some of the keynotes of the drama in lines here and there. See how modern they sound! "When you pant for power, little can your hard hearts know of holiness;" that is, love of money often smothers the soul. "To get power ye will trample in lawless contempt love and a woman's worth;" that is, all ideals, all love, is forsworn for gold. Again: "When to a ring this gold is fashioned, it grasps and holds the world;" that is, the ring is organized wealth, great corporations. "This tarnhelm makes invisible;" a board of directors is impersonal, irresponsible, invisible, — the corporation is soulless. "Unto him ye are slaves, ye must cringe and serve;" so gold speaks to the swarms of workers. "Lazy hounds, heap up my wealth, dig out my metal, melt it into bars!" so speaks a modern master of the mines, steel, copper, or coal. "Tremble in terror, O slaves, heed his rule who holds the ring!" that is, gold is king. But there is also another side shown here: "Beware of the host when the Nibelungs shall upheave from night to day;" that is, when the

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labor world awakes and asserts itself. All this makes a tremendously strong parable. Lust of gold is shown as responsible for the loss of spiritual nature, ideals, love. It has brought cruelty, oppression, lying, robbery, murder. But it also brings the social upheaval which finally awakens the true ideals and ushers in the better day.

Or, finally, we may take the drama as veiling great spiritual and eternal truths, not put there by Wagner, but inherent in the great story itself and forever working themselves out into revelations in all the great legends and in all the great events of the world. In this last view there comes out the truth of the curse of the lust of power; the truth of the real supremacy of love; the truth of the inevitableness and eternity of the reign of moral law in the world.

Looking at the universal and eternal truths, therefore, the main idea of the whole Ring drama may be given in this one phrase: "To show the contrast of the two powers that rule the world, —the power of love and the power of gold." The chief thought in *The Rhine-Gold* is: "Base love of gold destroys golden love, and prophesies ruin and the curse." In *The Valkyrie*: "The reign of law, and the inevitableness of fate." In *Siegfried*: "Courage, born of innocence, outvies all cunning, and, inspired by love, conquers all things." In *The Dusk of the Gods*: "Ambition betrays itself, but love, through self-sacrifice, is supreme, and redeems the curse." Or we may see a little more fully in some such way as this: *The Rhine-Gold* is a parable of the

curse of gold. Innocent enough is gold itself ; it becomes a power and can become a curse when its inordinate love takes possession of the soul. Its love forsworn is sufficient to gain gold, but what is it all worth?

for Wotan
The Valkyrie is a parable of the punishment of violated laws. There is a reign of law in the world. Whoso offends must suffer. It is inevitable. Heaven itself is subject to its divine laws. Siegfried is a type of perfect innocence and goodness. This hero seems an embodiment of "summer and springtide, youth and strength, beauty and love." He is the highest ideal of a free hero, caring nothing for gold, possessing all things good in himself. Such a hero of light is at once attacked by envy and hate. So he falls a victim of the dark wiles, the embodiment of envy, hatred, and greed in the child of evil.

The Dusk of the Gods is a parable of the passing away of the ancient mythologies. As light came, as the ages went on, men saw that the old legends of the gods and goddesses, who played fast and loose with law, who broke covenants, could not remain. Moral law must be supreme. Love in self-sacrifice is the great revelation. Unworthy gods, annihilated by the principle of evil which they have introduced, — this is the meaning of the allegory where the gods are devoured by the fiery flames. Myth passed to make way for truth. The gods passed away to give place to God.

There are some perplexing ethical problems involved in the drama. The infidelity of Wotan, both to love and truth, are sad pictures of the

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word** highest of the gods. The traditions, however, of Greek and Roman mythology are similar. The relations of Siegmund and Sieglinda have classic precedent among the gods, but are antagonistic to all our human instincts. The drama shows how love is superior to all law, and yet how the violation of law is inevitably punished. The greatest teaching of the drama is that love is supreme, but that the highest love is in full harmony with the highest law. In Browning's phrase, "All's love, yet all's law."

Richard Wagner's genius in all this great work is manifest. Ordinarily the Northern mythology has a curious interest for merely a few students and scholars. But the genius of Wagner, both in poetry and music, has brought this remote and mythical world to the living interest and ken of tens of thousands in all parts of the civilized world. German literature and the whole race owe much to him for this literary revival. But another debt we also owe to him. These old legends that grew up in most primitive ages from time to time found rude redactors, or editors, who endeavored to string the various legends together in continuous and harmonious narrative. Such was the ancient bard of the Nibelungen Lied. So in our own day Richard Wagner has performed a similar service, but in larger way and with more wonderful genius than any who has ever touched the legends. He found their unity and eternal significance and rearranged them to tell their greatest story for all time. Essentially this great fourfold drama is the drama of a primitive and pagan

era. It is an era long before Christianity, with no mention whatever of Greek, Roman, Jewish, or Christian gods or symbols. It is the atmosphere of ancient heathendom in the wilderness of most ancient Germany and Scandinavia. Nevertheless Richard Wagner makes the ancient story a modern revelation. This is a notable achievement. The great teaching of the supremacy of love, — was this in the ancient myths or thought of the primitive people? We cannot find it on the surface of the ancient legends. And yet Wagner has not read it into them, but rather unveiled it from them. He has so arranged his ancient material as to teach this universal and eternal truth, which only later and maturer understanding has made clear as being forever in the warp and woof of all human history and literature. As Wagner gives it, this drama is a great moral study, full of seriousness, conscience, and unending consequence. In this way the genius of Richard Wagner has given new vitality and significance to ancient myth and legend. He becomes an interpreter of humanity and a teacher of the greatest truths of life.

OLIVER HUCKEL

PART I: LAWLESS LOVE

LAWLESS LOVE



STORM is raging! Hark the howling winds

That sweep the forest! Hark the driving rain

In flood among the oaks! Flame follows flame,
And stroke on stroke the crashing thunderbolts!

A desperate night for any hapless wretch
Caught in the forests. Storm and double dark
Make desperate fears and shuddering gloom
profound.

Yet here within this forest, tempest swept,
A wounded warrior seeks some refuge safe
From nature's fury and from man's pursuit,—
Siegmund his name, sprung of a lordly race
And stern taught in fierce battle from his youth,
Until the years had bred a stalwart soul,
And body strong in sinew, chest, and limb;
A wolf in fierceness, but a god in grace.
Spent were his days in war implacable
Against the tribe of Neidings who had wrought
Murder and ruin to his hearth and home.
Now in a fight most desperate and long
His kinsmen had been slain, and he alone
Escaped. Wounded, half dead, he fled
Into the pathless forest and the night,
When tempest o'er him broke. But still he fled,
And stumbled on, until at last his eye
Caught the red glimmer of a quivering light
Through gaping window of a forest lodge.
Spurred by his need, he groped and found the
door

And slowly seized the latch, and raised himself

Lawless And entered.
Love

A great rude room it was,
But bright with blazing fire upon the hearth.
A moment, with the latch still in his hand,
Around he gazed, but none were there to bid
Him welcome, or to turn him from the door.
So with the final effort of his strength
He staggered to the hearth, and threw himself
Upon a bearskin with the muttered words:
"Whose hearth this is, be it of friend or foe,
Here must I rest!"

And as all limp he lay
Too desperate weary for the gift of sleep,
But motionless, the great fire on the hearth
Upblazed with ruddy warmth and genial glow
And showed him all the fashion of the room.
Forsooth the dwelling of some forest chief, —
A great rude house, yet noble in its way.
'T was built around an ash-tree's mighty stem,
Whose heaving roots spread for a rustic floor;
The upper boughs climbed through the dwell-
ing's roof,
And gave a grateful shade to all the house;
The walls were great logs, roughly hewn and
laid,
With here and there an ornament of mats
Wrought of rough reeds and grass, or hanging
stuff
Woven of linen or the rude-stained wool.
But seeing all, his eye went back again
To the great hearth rude-built of mighty
stones,
With its big chimney sidling through the
roof, —

A hearth with blazing bed of welcome warmth.
Behind the hearth, on one side was a room
Approached by steps, — a room perchance for
stores;

And on the other side an inner room
Whose entrance was by woven curtains hid,
A sign that woman's grace had touched the
place.

And in the midst before the open fire
A great oak table for the trencher stood,
With rough-hewed stools and one hand-carven
bench,
A seat of honor for some welcome guest.

The fire burned low, and, wearied, Siegmund
slept,

His senses lulled in all the genial glow;
And as he slept, forth from the inner room
A white-robed figure stole with softest tread, —
A blue-eyed maiden, with a wealth of gold
Crowning her head and flowing in rich tides
To her mid-waist. She came most dutiful
To greet her chieftain coming from the chase, —
For she had heard the closing of the door, —
When, lo! she saw a stranger on her hearth,
His garments torn, pallid his face and worn,
And all insensible in heavy sleep.

Gazing she murmured: "What! a stranger
here?"

Yet must I speak and ask him whence he
came."

So she drew near and asked in gentle speech:
"Who art thou that dost come all unannounced
And darest thus to lie upon this hearth?"

**Lawless
Love**

But Siegmund did not stir. He slept as one
Who day and night has followed hard the
chase,
Or as a warrior after desperate war.
So she drew nearer, and beheld his face, —
A fair and noble face to look upon, —
And mused she: "He is worn and sore dis-
tressed
With some long journey. Or perchance he
faints
From hunger or from pain of hidden wounds?"
She knelt beside him, and her fair head bent
To listen to his breathing. "Yea, he breathes
Heavy and deep. His heart seems strong. 'T is
sleep
Has closed the eyes to give him gift of rest.
Behold, he seems a noble, valiant knight.
How strong that frame, though weary now and
weak!"

Then Siegmund roused, slow lifted up his head
And panted with parched lips: "Water! I
thirst!"
At which she snatched a drinking-horn, and ran
To a cool spring that bubbled crystal pure
Outside the door, and bore the brimming cup
Back to the panting stranger, while she spake:
"Come, touch thy fevered lips to this cool
draught,
'T is water, cooling water, from the spring."
He drank and handed her the empty horn,
And thanked her with his eyes. Then gazed at
her
As if she were a goddess come to earth.

He seemed enthralled by some strange, mystic
spell.

Lawless
Love

At length he spake: "This water brings to me
Grateful refreshment both for lips and heart.
Somehow it lightens all my load of life,
Wakens my brain, and bids my eyes rejoice
In all the blessed joyfulness of earth.
Pray, tell me who thou art that thus hath
wrought
A miracle and given me new life?"

Whereat she answered with a winsome smile:
"Here greets thee Hunding's house and Hun-
ding's wife;
Nor will they grudge a stranger needed rest.
Tarry until my lord himself shall come."

But Siegmund answered: "Weaponless am I!
Perchance thy lord would welcome not a guest
Who weaponless and wounded seeks his
hearth?"

Anxious she spake: "Art wounded? Show me
quick
Thy hurts, and I will bind them up for thee!"

But Siegmund shook himself, and springing up
From the rude bearskin, spake with new-found
strength:

"My wounds? Speak not of them — they are no
more;

Again I feel my strength in every limb.

Yea, had my shield and spear been strong as
now

**Lawless
Love**

This strong right arm, ne'er had I fled my
foes;
But spear and shield were shivered, foes pressed
sore,
And sudden o'er my head the tempest broke.
Hold! all is well again! Swifter than flight
Before the hounds, my weariness is gone;
The night that held my heavy eyes in thrall
Has fled, and smiling sunshine greets me
now."

Meanwhile a horn with foaming mead she
filled,
And with a smile she handed it, and spake:
"Perchance more sunshine greets thee in this
horn."

Begged Siegmund: "Honor it, I pray, by thine
own lips."

She sipped, and proffered it again to him,
And Siegmund taking, drained it at one
draught,
With grateful thanks for her fair courtesy.
Yet as he spake, he gazed into her eyes
As if subdued by some mysterious fate.
Then softly, with unsteady voice, he spake:
"Thou hast befriended here misfortune's child.
May his dark, woeful fate be never thine."
Again he looked in sadness on her face,
And sighed, and turned away, and gloomy
gazed
Upon the ground. Then suddenly he spake,
Turning his footsteps quickly to the door:

"Here have I rested, yea, been well refreshed; **Lawless**
Now must I further wend my weary way." **Love**

But quietly she asked: "Who follows thee
So dread, that thou art eager to be gone?"

And Siegmund, by her tender voice constrained,
Turned slowly back, and wearily he spake:
"Where'er I turn ill fortune dogs my steps.
I would not have my sorrow come to thee,
So go I forth and leave thee to thy peace."

Straightway he turned his footsteps to the
door,
And lifted up the latch, when quick she called:
"Nay, tarry here! Thou canst not bring me
woe,
For woe is here already, constant guest."

Startled, he paused, and stood in anxious
thought,
Searching her face. With downcast eyes and
sad,
Silent she waited. Siegmund came again
And leaned against the hearth, and sadly
spake:
"My name is 'Woeful,' thus I call myself,
And thus most woeful will I Hunding wait."

Still leaning on the hearth, he turned to her
And gazed upon her face. Her kindly glance
She raised to him and in deep sympathy.
Long did they look into each other's eyes
In tender, troubled silence. For their hearts

Lawless
Love

Felt the weird working of some inner fire.
Then suddenly she started, for she heard
The steps of Hunding, and the horse's hoofs
Pawing the rocky path outside the door.
Quickly she ran, lifted the wooden latch,
And peered into the darkness. Then came one
Rough-visaged, strong, bearing his shield and
spear;
But on the threshold stayed his steps and
glowered
As his fierce eye perceived a stranger there.
Severe he looked in question on his wife,
But bold she met his glance, and answered
him:
"This stranger found I sunk upon our hearth:
Distress had driven him to seek our help."

"Forsooth, thou gavest it?" his harsh voice
growled.

"Yea, I did give him drink, as any guest,
Nor drove him from the shelter of our hearth."

Then Siegmund: "Thou wilt chide her for this
deed
For which I thank thee?"

Hunding's brow still knit,
And curt he spake: "Sacred is hearth and home,
And by its laws thou shalt find shelter here."

Doffing his weapons, Hunding gave them swift
To her who hung them on the ash-tree's
boughs;

His next command: "Come, serve us quick
with food!"

Lawless
Love

Obedient she brought the trencher hot
And set it on the table, with a glance
Of secret warning at the wrathful guest.
And Hunding also glanced, from time to time,
Upon the other's face in deep amaze,
For as he gazed, he saw resemblance there
To his own wife, and muttered to himself:
"Strange, that same look in both! Yea, that
same gleam,
Her serpent gleam, shines from his glittering
eye."

Concealing his surprise, he turned and spake
To Siegmund in a tone unmoved and cold:
"Stranger, forsooth, thou camest from afar;
And hast thou had no horse to ease thy path,
But plodded all on foot these rugged roads?"

And Siegmund answered: "Yea, through thorn
and brake,
Through fen and forest, have I stumbled on,
Driven by storm and fierce extremity;
Nor kenned I of the way by which I came,
Nor wist I how I wandered in the woods.
I would I knew how I had reached this place!"

Seating himself at supper, Hunding spake,
Giving a seat to Siegmund at the board:
"Of this strong roof-tree, and this hearth and
home,
Hunding is called the host. If thou shouldst
wend
Thy footsteps westward when thou leavest me,

**Lawless
Love**

Rich homesteads thou wouldst find on every
hand;
These are my kith and kin, of Hunding's name.
Now as my guest, I hope thou mayst be free
To speak thy name here at my sheltering
hearth."

Siegmund a moment gazed in troubled thought
Before him, choosing well his answering words.
While Hunding's wife, close seated by her
spouse,
Fixed her rapt eyes upon their silent guest
With questioning grace and fair expectancy.
Looking from one to other Hunding spake:
"Whate'er thy care or trouble, make it known,—
This listening wife all eager is to hear.
Behold, how greedy are her questioning eyes!"

But she scarce heeding this suspicious sneer,
Looked with calm kindness, answering in the
words:
"Yea, guest, whoe'er thou art, tell all to us."

And Siegmund, gazing in her eyes, began:
"I would my name were 'Joyful,' yet 't is not;
But 'Woeful' it is, 'Woeful' must it be.
My father was named Wolfing, and as twins
Were born my tender sister and myself.
My mother and my sister soon were lost,—
She who had borne me, she who played with
me;
For Wolfing was a strong and warring chief,
And oft harassed and conquered many foes.
One day we foraged through the forest wilds,

And when at eve we wended home our way, **Lawless**
Behold, our house lay there a blackened waste, **Love**
A smoking heap of ashes; and the oaks
That made our roof-tree stood there blackened
stumps.

And O, accursèd deed! slain with the sword,
And thrown upon the heap, my mother lay,
And no trace of my sister quick or dead.
Who wrought this fiendish wrong, well did we
know,—

'T was that rough horde of Neidings, our fierce
foes.

In heavy woe my father fled with me;
Long years we lived within the forest wilds;
Oft did our foes pursue us in the woods,
But oft the Wolfing pair escaped their spears,
And lived in fierce revenge to harass them.
I am a Wolfing and I tell thee bold,
For as a Wolfing am I widely known."

And Hunding spake: "Thou fierce and fearless
guest,
Most wild and wondrous tales thou tellest us!
Woeful the Wolfing! I have heard of thee
And of thy father, and these desperate deeds.
Mine eyes have never seen thee till this hour."

Then spake his wife: "Pray, stranger, tell us
more,—
Where lives thy warrior father in these days?"

And Siegmund, glancing at her, still spake on:
"A mighty onslaught once the Neidings made,
But many we hewed down, and many fled;

Lawless
Love

We chased them like the chaff before the wind.
Far from my father strayed I in the chase,
And when I came to seek him, found him not,—
Naught but his lonely wolfskin in the woods.
From that day have I shunned the forest wilds
And sheltered me where men and women are;
Yet on me seems to dwell a darkening spell.
Where'er I wander, or where'er I fare,
Whether I seek a lover or a friend,
Always ill luck is with me, and all woe.
What I uphold as right seems to be wrong;
What I think wrong, to others seems as right.
Where'er I fare, always I find a feud,
And where I tarry, there springs up a strife.
When I seek pleasure, only pain I find.
Therefore as 'Woeful' am I rightly named,
For full of woe are all my weary days."

Harshly did Hunding answer with a sneer:
"The Norns who knitted up thy fate for thee
Had naught of love for thee. Nor do I greet
As welcome guest such strange ill-fated one."

But quick the wife put in a kindly word:
"Foolish to have a fear of such an one,—
A weaponless and lonely fugitive.
Pray, tell us, guest, thy latest feat of arms,—
How didst thou lose thy weapons in the fight?"

And Siegmund answered her with glowing
warmth:

"A weeping maiden cried to me for help
Against her kindred who would marry her
To one she hated. Swift I lent my aid;

My sword fought passage through the heart-
less crew,

Lawless
Love

Slaying to right and left. But in the throng
Unwittingly I struck her brothers down.
She fell upon their bodies with wild grief,
Forgotten her own wrongs in this new woe.
With floods of bitterest tears she mourned
their doom;
She wailed and shrieked for vengeance de-
sperate.

Whereat more kindred gathered to the fray,
And stormed around me, yelling for revenge.
The rabble panted, fiercer in their wrath;
Hot were their words against the weeping
maid.

Long with my shield and spear I sheltered her,
Until my weapons were hewn down and gone,
Then wounded sore and weaponless I stood
Defending her, but soon she breathed her last.
Then when the maiden moved no more, I fled.
So, mistress, now thou knowest all the tale
And why the name of 'Joyful' is not mine."

With glance at her of ardor and deep pain
He rose, and to the hearth made slow his way,
While she, deep moved by what his tale had
told,

Grew pale, and cast her eyes upon the ground.

Then Hunding, dark with anger, spake to him:
"Shameless your race and you, I know it well;
Ye hold naught holy that we hold most dear;
Hateful ye are to all my kith and kin.
To vengeance was I lately summoned forth

Lawless
Love

To take a fierce revenge for kindred's blood;
Too late I reached the place, but now at home
Find I the very foe upon my hearth.
Harken! For this one night thou art my guest;
But on the morrow, at the dawn of day,
I call thee to the fight and to thy death.
My kindred's blood shall I require of thee."

His wife with anxious gestures quick had
come
Between the angry twain, but loud he cried:
"Go, woman, to thy room! Begone, I say!
Prepare my night drink — get it with all speed!
Wait in the inner room! I'll speak with thee!"

She took the horn, and filled it with the drink,
And from the board the spices. In her hand
One spice she held a moment, deep in thought,
Before she mingled it within the drink.
Then toward the inner chamber moved she on.
She reached the topmost step, and slowly
turned
And gazed at Siegmund with a wistful look,
And with a glance that held a secret hid;
Then turned her eyes to the great ash-tree,
As if it held some meaning for this guest.
But Siegmund did not understand her glance,
And stood in sullen anger near the hearth,
With eyes absorbed in pity for her fate.
Fierce Hunding brooked no dalliance on her
way,
But drove her on with gesture of command,
And she was gone, with drinking-horn and
light.

Snatching his weapons, Hunding fiercely cried: **Lawless**
"Behold these weapons — they shall drink thy **Love**
blood!

To-morrow morn, O Wolfing, thou must die!
My word thou hearest! Guard thee well, I say!"
He spake, and dragging all his clanging arms,
He sought the inner chamber, and was gone.

Low burned the flickering fire upon the hearth
And all was gloom and silence in the house.
Sigmund sank down upon a bench to rest,
But fierce and troubled thoughts drove out all
sleep.

He spake: "Did not my father promise me
A sword should come for my most desperate
need?

This is my direst strait when, weaponless,
Here am I snared within a foeman's lair,
And doomed to die to satisfy his hate.
Nor me alone; this woman fair I see
Held here, and all my soul is fiercely stirred.
None that I ever saw so lures my heart, —
My fate is linked with her in some strange
bond;

Yet she is held in durance by this wretch.
I know her bonds are hateful force and fear.
And me, all weaponless, he mocks and scorns.
O Volsung, Volsung! where is now the sword,
That valiant sword, to aid my dire distress?
O madness, that my burning heart would hide,
Now dost thou break in glowing passion forth!"

Scarce had he spake when, dying, flamed the
fire

Lawless
Love

Upon the hearth, and from the ruddy glow
A bright ray struck the ash-tree's mighty
trunk

And flashed upon a sword-hilt buried there.
And Siegmund saw the bright glow on the
hilt,

But did not know it for a buried sword,
Nor did he yet its mystic portent ken,
But murmured in a dreamy revery:

"What glitters there, lit by the fire's red
gleams?

Some sudden star beams from the ash-tree's
stem;

It shines upon my eyes with blinding flash,
And now it twinkles in a merry mood;
Its soft gleam seems to gladden all my heart.
Perchance it is the fair one's gracious look
Still lingering there with bright, alluring ray;
For thither did she send her last fond glance
Ere from the hall she passed, and gloom came
on.

What witching glamor shone within her eyes!
This soul of mine was shrouded in black woe,
When on me fell that gracious heavenly glance,
And hope revived and gladness came again.
Yea, wondrous rose my glorious golden sun
And round me shone its sparkling radiance,
Until behind the hills the light was hid,
When that fair face, those wondrous eyes, were
gone.

Yet like a sunset's radiant after-glow
Still shines upon the aged ash-tree's limbs
The golden glimmer of her gladdening glance.
Slowly that ruddy glow is vanishing,

The light sinks low, the heavy shadows fall,
Yet in my heart still gleams her deathless
light.”

Lawless
Love

While thus he mused, the moments sped along
Until the embers of the fire turned gray,
And utter darkness veiled the quiet room.
Sudden a sound was heard of opening door,
And gentle footsteps on the creaking stairs,
And Siegmund heard the rustle of a gown,
The whisper of a voice: “Art thou awake?”

And springing up, he spake: “Who cometh
here?”

But softly and in haste the sweet voice said:
“’T is I; and listen well to what I say.
Hunding sleeps on; I know he will not
wake,—
I mixed his night-drink with a heavy drug.
This night is thine,— to save thyself by flight.”

Then Siegmund quick broke in with ardent
words:
“Naught do I fear when thou art by my side!”

But she spake on: “A weapon thou shalt
have,—
Yea, I will lead thee to a glorious sword.
Draw it and thou shalt highest hero be;
Wield it, and strongest of the sons of men.
Heed well and ponder what I tell to thee:
Once in this hall had Hunding kith and kin
To keep his wedding with a wassail-bout.

**Lawless
Love**

A maid he wedded whom he never wooed,
But dragged her from her home in bitter tears,
And beat her to his will with direful threats.
That maid was I, and sorrowful I sat
Through all the drinking and the merry din.
Sudden a stranger entered, weird in mien,
And clad in garments gray. His heavy hat
Hung low upon his brow, and hid one eye,
Yet from the other eye flashed forth a light
That sent a thrill of awe to every heart.
Men saw and felt a stern and haughty power,
Like a quick flash of lightning in a storm;
But unto me alone there seemed to come
From that same look sweet solace and fair
sooth,
Sadness and gladness both, with weal for me.
He smiled on me, but scowled upon the crowd,
As in his hands he swung a mighty sword,
And lifting high, he sought the ash-tree's
heart,
Drove deep the blade with one great lunging
blow,—
Drove it and buried it e'en to the hilt
Within the mighty ash-tree's quivering side.
Loudly he spake: 'To him the sword belongs
Whose brawn can draw it from the ash-tree's
heart!'
Then many strove to win it for themselves,—
The strongest arms, the stoutest hearts of
men,—
But all in vain. The blade abode in peace;
Guests came and went, and each tugged with
his might;
But all their labors not a tremor woke,—

The sword still slept within the ash-tree's
sheath.

Lawless
Love

Whereat it dawned upon me, and I wist
Who that gray guest had been who greeted
me

So solemnly and yet with wondrous peace;
And then I knew that for my destined help
He came that day, and in the days of fate
Should come a hero, and pluck out the sword,
And be my hero and deliverer.

My heart quick tells me he is come to-day,
Come from afar to succor my distress;
And all that I have suffered with sad soul,
Yea, all of scorn and shame I have endured,
Will be forgot in vengeance strong and sweet.
What I have lost, he shall restore again;
What I have mourned shall now rejoicing be.
Yea, these mine eyes behold this royal friend,
And these mine arms would fold him to my
heart!"

And at the word, Siegmund with throbbing
heart

Clasped her, and held her in his fierce em-
brace,

With burning words: "Yea, now thy hero
comes,

And claims the sword and thee by right di-
vine.

Warm in this heart there glows a fire of love
That links me to thy heart in truest bonds.

All that my heart hath hoped, I see in thee,
All that my soul hath lacked, find I in thee.

Wept thou in woe, so writhed I in distress;

Lawless As I was scorned, so wast thou dragged in
Love shame.

Hear now my cry of fierce, revengeful joy!
In triumph high elate, I hold thee fast,
And feel thy true heart beating against mine."

Sudden a sound,—the great door opened wide,
And in alarm the maiden started up
And tore herself from the beloved embrace,
And stood and listened, with the whispered
cry:

"Who went, or who perchance has entered
here?"

But no one spake, and the great door stood
wide

And showed a vision of the lovely night.

'T was springtime, and the moon was shining
clear

And pouring silver glory on the earth,—
A wondrous witchery on forest boughs,
A fairy fretwork of rare tracery,
And on the forest paths a mystic glow,
Like taper light in far cathedral aisles.

And Siegmund whispered, full of ecstasy:

"My love, no one has passed, but one draws
near.

Behold her, fairest Spring, in moonlight clad."

Then as the moonlight ever fairer glowed
And they beheld each other in its grace,
Once more they drew together in fresh love,
And sat them down while Siegmund softly
sang:



SIEGMUND AND SIEGLINDA

“WINTER storms are waning
’Neath the winsome moon,
Spring all softly smiling
Lightly comes full soon,
And each wanton zephyr
In her worship bends,
While she weaves her wonders
Everywhere she wends.

“Over woods and hillsides
Fragrant breath she breathes;
Laughing o’er the meadows
A sunshine crown she wreathes.
And her tones so pleasant,
Like a silver lyre,
Are birds in merriest music,—
The happy forest choir.

“From her heart outbursteth
Blossoms every day;
From her tender bosom
Climbs the verdant spray.
Yea, her softest sceptre
Sways the mighty world,
When the queenly Springtime
Banners hath unfurled.

“Then the haughty Winter,
Hardy, stubborn, free,
Must forgo his coldness
And a brother be.
More than brother—lover—
Must he woo fair Spring;
Her lure within his bosom,
His spirit all a-wing.

Lawless
Love

“Winter and fair Springtide
At last together come,
And in her tender heart’s-nest
He finds his blissful home.
His sister and his consort,
O fair and fragrant Spring!
Bliss crowns the bridal lovers,
And we their rapture sing.”

Then softly the fair maid to Siegmund spake:
“To me thou art that first breath of the Spring
That breaks the frosty winter of my woes;
From that first moment when I saw thy face,
With heavenly thrill my heart hath greeted
thee.

Before that hour all things seemed strange to
me,

And alien all the world, both friends and foes,
Myself forever friendless and forlorn.

Yet saw I thee, nor wert thou strange to me,
And as I gazed, I knew that thou wert mine.

Yea, what had lain so long a mystery

Within my heart was now as clear as day.

Although all else was winter and black woe,

I seemed to hear a sweet song in my soul,

When at the last my hero came to me.”

Within her loving arms she held him fast,

Feasting her eyes upon his glowing face

With radiant bliss and overflowing joy.

While he in transport of deep rapture cried:

“O wondrous bliss! O fairest love divine!”

Again she gazed into his eyes, and cried:

"O let me lie in loving nearness here,
And gaze and gaze into thine eyes' clear depths!
I see a light that breaketh there like dawn,
And filleth all my soul with heavenly joy."

Lawless
Love

In words of softest music low he spake:
"So fair the moonbeams on thy tresses fall
They weave a wreath of light above thy brow.
O dearest, this bewitched me first and last,—
Thy heart, thy beauty,—let me feast my eyes!"

Gently she pushed his locks from his fair brow,
Thrilling with every touch and soft caress,
And gazed with fresh astonishment of love
As memory surged within her. Loud she cried:
"How broad and noble is thy radiant brow,
And royal on thy temple the blue veins.
With deep emotion am I all suffused,
For memory is awaking in my soul
Of times and loved ones of my earliest days.
Was it to-day I saw thee for the first?
Nay, this my heart has always known thy
face."

And Siegmund answered in a glowing joy:
"'T is true, for this same feeling fills my soul.
'T was long ago that I beheld thy face
And loved thee in the dreamings of my youth."

Again she spake: "Sometimes within the brook,
When all was quiet, I have seen my face;
But when I look on thee, I see again
Myself, but in a nobler, greater form,—
A mirror of my heart's deep far ideal."

Lawless
Love

And he: "Strange! 't was thine image I have
held
Forever in my inmost heart of hearts."

Then suddenly she turned away her gaze,
And whispered: "Hush, and let me hark again
To that dear voice that ringeth in my soul.
Out from my childhood days it seems to peal —
Yet, hold! it was the same voice ringing clear
When once I heard my echo through the
woods."

And Siegmund answered in most loving tones:
"Thy voice sounds in my ear like loveliest
lute."

Again she searched his features, speaking
quick:

"Yea, well I know that look within thine eyes, —
This same look had that strange gray guest
of yore

When by his kindly words he soothed my woe,
And in that dauntless glance I knew my sire.
Fain would I name him by the name I knew."
But here she paused, and thought awhile. Then
spake:

"Say truly now, is 'Woeful' thy right name?"

And joyfully did Siegmund answer her:

"Nay, never more. Since thou dost love me true,
Nothing of woe, but all of joy am I!"

Yet once again she asked him eagerly:

"Nor though thou art so joyful in my love,
Is 'Joyful' thy right name? Now tell me true!"

And with a happy laugh, he spake again:
"Name me thyself. Whatever name thy lips
Shall love to speak, that name is henceforth
mine,—
No other name or title will I own!"

Lawless
Love

She spake again: "When thou didst tell thy
tale
Thou saidst that Wolfing was thy father's
name."

Smiling he answered: "Yea, a Wolfing fierce
He was to all the foxes of the fields,
And oft he frightened all their craven hearts.
Yet listen, O my fairest, noblest one:
He whose proud eyes are beaming now on thee
With light that gets its lustre from thine own,
He tells thee truly,—Volsung is his name!"

And she in transport cried: "Volsung his name!
Yea, I was sure that he thy father was!
And 't was for thee he drove the mighty sword
Deep in yon ash-tree, even to the hilt!
So I may name thee now as my heart speaks—
I name thee Siegmund, dearest of all names!
My hero, brother, strong, victorious one!"

And springing up with fierce, exultant joy
Rushed Siegmund to the monstrous ash-tree's
trunk,
And with strong hand he grasped the hilt, and
cried:
"Yea, I am Siegmund—thou hast named me
true!"

Lawless
Love

Behold my sword which now I boldly seize;
The Volsung promised me that in my need,
My desperate need, it should be near my hand.
And here it is, now shall I make it mine.

'Help-Need! Help-Need!' so name I this great
sword.

'Help-Need! Help-Need!'—blade of the keen-
est joy,—

Approve for me thy temper and thine edge.
Come, leap from thy close sheath at my fierce
call!"

So cried he, as he grasped the gleaming hilt,
And braced his feet against the mighty tree,
And all his strength he heaved in quivering
brawn.

With one long tug he drew the sword to light,
And held it up rejoicing to her gaze,
As in deep awe and rapture still she stood.

Then loud he cried: "Behold, O fairest love,
Siegmond the Volsung stands revealed to thee,
And for a token brings to thee this sword!
Forth in the moonlight, in the springtide forth!
Come, O my love, Help-Need shall guard thee
well!

Come, O my love, Siegmund shall live for thee!"

His right hand grasped the sword, his left out-
stretched

To lead her on their journey through the world;
But for a moment she, resisting, cried:

"And art thou Siegmund that I here behold,—
My lost, lost brother of the days of yore?
Behold, I am Sieglinda, and thine own,

Thy sister that hath sighed and longed for thee. **Lawless**
See, thou hast won thy sister and thy sword!" **Love**

Then with a cry of joy, she sought his arms,
And in the fierceness of long dormant love
That shook his being to its inmost depths,
He cried: "Yea, sister art thou, and yet mate.
We are the last of Volsungs, and must live
Each for the other, and our god-like sire."

He spake and kissed her. Thus, with mighty
sword,
Gift of great Wotan, dauntless in its might,
And with the gift of love within their hearts,
And with the crown of joy upon their brows,
This happy twain went forth in the wide
world,—
Facing glad sunrise fared they, hand in hand,
Springtide without and springtide in their
souls.

PART II: THE DAY OF RECKONING

THE DAY OF RECKONING



HIGH where the mountains lift their
snowy crests
Above the mists, while shifting banks
of clouds

Float o'er the darkness of the lower world ;
High where the heavens kiss the brow of earth
And seem to mingle in one lustrous sheen,—
Here in a wild and rocky mountain pass,
A gorge cut deep into the sloping sides,
And backed by massive heights and towering
peaks,

Stood Wotan, in his warlike gear arrayed.
Majestic was the sovereign of the gods,—
Solemn and stern his eyes, and firm his mouth,
As if great issues hung upon his words.
Bright was his massive spear, his helm, his
shield,

And mighty showed the thews of his strong arm.
Before him stood Brunnhilda, battle maid,
Clad in full armor for the fiercest fray.
Most beautiful she was in face and form,
A strength heroic on her noble brow ;
Most godlike, and most radiant in grace ;
Greatest was she of all the battle maids,—
Those daughters born of Wotan's human
loves,—

The fair Valkyries who do Wotan's will
And hover o'er the battle fields of earth
To snatch away the valiant heroes slain,
And bear them to Valhalla, where they live
In pleasance and in glory of new strength,
To guard great Wotan from the darkening
doom.

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

Proudly upon Brunnhilda now he looked,
And spake to her: "My stalwart daughter,
hark!

Make ready thy swift steed, for battle's brawl
Shall shortly break upon us in fierce wrath.
Brunnhilda, spur thee to the carnage field
And to the Volsung give thy favoring aid.
'T is Hunding sues the heavenly gods for help,
But vain his hopes,—Valhalla loves him not.
So speed thee to the fray, and do my will."

Swift at the word, Brunnhilda upward sprang,
Mounting from rock to rock with shrilling call
That echoed through the gorge and mountain
heights,—

A battle call to all the battle maids,
The warrior sisters and their wingèd steeds;
And fierce and loud, exultant rang the call:
"Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!"
And all the echoes answered: "Ho-heiho!"

Upon the lofty mountain peak she paused,
Gazing afar with anxious looks and keen;
Then looking down at Wotan, slow she spake:
"List to my counsel, Father, have a care,
Behold a furious tempest on its way;
'T is driving fast with chariot of rams,
'T is watchful Fricka, thy devoted spouse.
Furious she snaps her whip of golden thongs,
And see! the foolish beasts are mad with fear.
Hear the wheels rattle on the rocky road
As on they whirl her fiercely to the fray.
Father, be wary in this coming storm,
For lightly must I leave thee in the lurch.

Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!"
She called, and mounted higher, and was gone.

The
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ing

Along the gorge the rattling chariot came,
Bearing fair Fricka, beauteous queen of gods,
Guardian of marriage and all lawful love,
Preserver of the troths and rights of love,
Fierce hater of unfaithfulness and shame.

Fuming with rage she left the chariot,
And strode with angry footsteps to the pass
Where Wotan stood, absorbed in heavy
thought.

As she drew near, he muttered: "How she
storms,—

The same old rage and tempest of abuse;
Yet must I stand it, for she is my spouse."

And in a majesty of wrath she spake:

"Thou canst not hide in any mountain wild,
Thinking my watchful outlook to escape,
For I shall seek thee out and ask thy help,
And plead for justice for my righteous cause."

And in a weary voice he softly asked:

"What cause, my Fricka? Tell me thy com-
plaint."

Hotly she answered: "Hunding's rights I plead.
He hath been wronged, most deep and griev-
ously;

And now on me he calls for just revenge,
On me the queen of wedlock and love's law.
Now have I heard his prayer and come to thee,
Demanding that thou scourge the dastard
twain

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ing

Of rash and recreant souls who scorn my sway,
And break the sacred laws of hearth and
home."

And Wotan said: "Is this a dire offence
That they have wrought, allured by Love and
Spring?
Love hath wrought magic in their two young
lives!
Who heedeth law when love is sovereign
lord?"

With anger Fricka spake: "What senseless
words!
Thou seest not forsooth that all my plea
Is for fair wedlock and its holy law.
These dastards scorn and shame the sacred
vow."

Whereat he spake: "Unholy are all vows
That bind unloving hearts in chains of hate;
And prithee do not hope my laws can hold
Where thine are weak to curb the fires of love,
For when strong spirits waken to their life,
Often mine aid doth make a way for them."

Scornful she answered: "Seems it small to thee
To break a troth and shame a marriage bond?
And dost thou nod approval, aye, and praise
Such lawless deeds? Forsooth, I cry thee
shame!"

Then Wotan calm and stately answered her:
"Perchance thou dost not grasp what I have
said,

Nor dost thou comprehend this abstruse case
Which, being new, demands new thought and
act.

Thou seest but the letter of the law,
While I am thinking of far deeper things.
Listen! our deep distress demands a man,
A hero who, apart from heavenly powers,
Shall freely work, nor call the gods to aid.
So only shall he work that mighty work
Which, though the need in heaven be great
and deep,
The gods themselves can never bring to pass."

But she replied: "Dost thou deceive me thus
With lying thoughts? What help could man-
kind bring
To work great deeds forbidden to the gods
From whom the heroes get their gifts and
powers?"

But Wotan asked: "Who gives them their
brave hearts,—
Dost thou not count their courage as their
own?"

Impatient spake she in indignant tones:
"Who breathes this dauntless courage in their
souls,
Who brightens their wan faces with new hope?
'T is thy strong shield that makes their sinews
strong,
'T is thy fierce fire that wakes their battle blood;
'T is thou, and thou alone, that stirrest them
To do what thou dost boast eternally.

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ing

Thou wouldst befool me with thy newer lies,
And trick me with thy fresh contrivances.
Nay! for this Volsung, thou dost plead in vain.
Through him I strike a just blow at thy sin, —
For he is daring only through thy grace."

Then Wotan spake: "Remember his sad lot;
Long lived he all alone and dark with woe,
Nor did my shield protect him in those days."

Quick she broke in: "To-day hold back this
shield,
And snatch again the sword thou gavest him!"

Amazed cried Wotan in a breath: "The sword?"

Yet fast she spake: "Yea, so I said, — the sword,
The magic sword, the mighty matchless sword,
This Volsung upstart hath laid hands upon."

But he replied: "That sword has Siegmund
won —
He won it in his need by his own brawn."

Scornful she spake: "Thou madest both the
need
And the great sword to meet him in his need.
Speak! dost thou dare deny the truth I tell,
When day and night I followed and saw all?
Yea, 't was for him the sword thou dravest deep
Into the ash-tree's heart, and kept it there.
Surely thou must confess thine own bright
scheme
That led him to the finding of the blade."

Wotan was stirred,—his secret plans discerned,—

For she had watched and known his slightest move.

Her keen eyes pierced him like an eagle's glance;

He trembled, and his haughty bearing changed
As now he felt a deepening distress.

Yet as she spake her last words, scorning him,
He started with a sudden show of wrath.

Then firmly Fricka spake, her gaze more stern:
“Hark ye! No sovereign with his subject
strives,

But scourges him for scandal or for shame;
Rightly I strive, sovereign with sovereign thus,
But Siegmund would I punish as my slave.”

Hot anger flamed again in Wotan's soul,
Knowing the sacred laws to which she held,
And which he dare not lightly set aside.
But soon in sullen gloom he turned away,
Feeling how weak he was in her just hands,—
Knowing his plans and scheming his defeat.

So she continued as she saw her power:
“This slave, forsooth, thou dost esteem and
love,

Therefore must I, thy lawful spouse, endure!
Must gladly welcome this base shameless one,
And seem the slave, and him as master greet,—
This scoff of varlets, and this scorn of knaves.
Ye gods! my king has never sunk so low
As to his queen to offer such despite.”

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ing

Then sullenly great Wotan slowly asked:
"What wouldst thou have? Pray tell me thy demand?"

Quick answered she: "Cast off the Volsung shame!"

Great Wotan trembled, tears were in his eyes,
As with choked voice, sadly he answered her:
"So be it. Let him go his way alone."

But she spake on: "Wotan, now heed me well,—
Thou must not shield him, nay, nor favor him,
When the avenger calls him to the fray."

And Wotan said: "I swear,— I cast him off!"

Sternly she spake again: "Nay, look at me,
Look in my eyes, and swear this further word,—
Forbid this Valkyr bold to give him aid."

He answered: "Nay, how dare I promise that?
The Valkyr always succors whom she will."

But Fricka still contended: "Nay, not so;
'T is thy command she doth alone obey.
Forbid her giving help to Siegmund's cause."

Now when great Wotan heard her cunning words,
And saw her purpose pitiless and sure,
And saw a vision of the bitter fall
Of him he loved so well, and all his hopes,—

His soul was stirred to tumult. Fear and love
Contended mightily. He feared to seem
To thwart his spouse, and yet he yearned to
make

A way to save the darling of his hopes.
To make an end of all, he swiftly cried:
"Nay, him I cannot harm,— he won my sword."

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ing

But she broke in: "Withdraw its magic power,
And ruthless let the brazen knave be crushed,
Or send him shieldless to the foeman's stroke."

Thereat she paused, for strident in the air,
Far on the heights, the shrill Valkyrie call
Was heard: "Hoyotoho! heiho! heiho!"
And soon upon the rocky mountain path
Appeared the fair Brunnhilda and her steed.

Spake Fricka: "Here she comes, thy warlike
maid;
Her battle cry is shrilling in my ears."

Not seeing them, again Brunnhilda called:
"Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!"

But when her eyes saw Fricka, she was still,
And silent led her steed along the path
Until she hid it in a secret cave.

But Wotan stood apart and murmured low:
"It was for Siegmund's sake I called her here."

But Fricka did not hear this muttered word,
And with a sudden thought she spake again:
"To-day let this bold Valkyr's dauntless shield

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ing**

Guard well the sacred honor of thy spouse,
And help me to uphold the sacred law;
For if our laws are laughed to scorn by men,
The gods themselves will speedily sink in shame,
And gone will be all glory and renown.
To-day, I say, let all our holy rights
Be full defended by this warlike maid,
And let the Volsung fall before our laws.
Now, Wotan, promise me, by sacred oath!"

In deep dejection, on a rocky seat,
Great Wotan threw himself, and hung his head
And thought in silence. Then at length he
spake:
"Yea, take my oath,—and may it do thee
good!"

The word once given, and her purpose gained,
Fair Fricka turned away, and down the path
She passed to mount her waiting chariot,
And met Brunnhilda, deigning her a glance.
With sharp, imperious voice she gave com-
mand:

"The great All-Father waits thee. Haste to
him.

He shall inform thee what his will decrees."
Thus spake the goddess, passing to her car,
And lashed her rams, and proudly drove away.

With anxious, wondering looks Brunnhilda
came

And sought out Wotan as he gloomy sat
And brooded, his sad head between his hands.
With quiet soothing spake her sympathy:

"All-Father, has the strife gone all awry,
For Fricka smiles, and sad must be thy fate?
Tell me, dear Father, what thy child can do
To ease thy troubled heart and downcast
face?"

But Wotan's arms fell powerless, and his head
Sank on his breast as wearily he said:
"The fetters are mine own that bind me fast,—
Yea, deeper bondage mine than my worst
slave."

Sadly Brunnhilda looked on him, and spake:
"Dear Father, never have I seen thee thus,
So worn and grieved. Tell me, what troubles
thee?"

But flinging up his arms in wild dismay
Great Wotan wailed: "O everlasting shame,
O desperate doom, that cometh to the gods,—
Endless disgrace and infinite despair!
And all is hasting, death and doom, through
me!
Saddest am I of all that live and breathe!"

Alarmed, the fair Brunnhilda dropped her
shield
And spear and helmet, and in anxious love
Sank at great Wotan's feet with eager words:
"O Father, Father! tell me all thy woe!
See how thy cares have filled thy child with
grief!
O trust in me, I am thy daughter true!
Behold how thy Brunnhilda doth beseech!"

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ing

With tender hands she clasped his mighty
knees,
And laid her head confiding on his lap.
Into her loving eyes great Wotan gazed,
And stroked her hair. At last he seemed to
wake

From some strange spell and uttered slow,
Beginning in a faint and broken voice:
"What if I let it be but spoke and heard, —
Shall I not lose my will's most secret hold?"

And in the same low voice Brunnhilda said:
"Tis to great Wotan's will that thou dost
speak, —
Tell me what thou dost wish. For who am I
Except the will to do what thou dost wish?"

But Wotan answered: "Nay, my secret
thoughts
That I have never breathed into the world
Abide within me, safe for evermore, —
Yet surely, surely, when I talk with thee,
'Tis only with myself that I commune."

Deep gazing into fair Brunnhilda's eyes
Still lower fell his voice, and sad he spake,
Telling the story of the age-old curse
The Rhine-gold brought upon both gods and
men:

"'Twas when the flush of youthful love had fled,
My heart became ambitious after power;
Impelled by wildest longings for wide sway,
At length I won dominion o'er the world.
Scarce witting of the ill I did, I stooped

To deep deception, — bound by treachery, —
Which only could be unbound by deceit.
Loki allured me by his subtle tongue;
Then faithless he deserted and was gone.
Yet never would I give up love, sweet love;
In all my power and fame, I longed for love.
But one there was, the baleful Nibelung,
Swart Alberich, in the abode of night,
Who broke love's bonds, cast love from out
his heart,
And cursed at love. And by that curse he won
The glittering treasure in the golden Rhine
Which made him master of a matchless might.
A ring which from the Rhine-gold he had
wrought,
Hoping to wield its magic o'er the world,
I ravished from him by a crafty wile,
And kept, despite the curse the dwarf en-
wrought.
With it I paid the ransom that I owed
To those old giants who had built for me
Valhalla from whose heights I rule the world.
Then Erda, ancient goddess, knowing all, —
Erda, most wise, most weird, most wonderful, —
Foretold dire evil for me through this ring;
Warned me of ruin and of woes most dark.
Deeply I longed to know my fate more clear,
But silently she vanished from my sight.
With her departed all my peace of mind;
I longed to have full knowledge of all things,
And of the days of doom for the high gods.
Again I sought for Erda in earth's depths
And won the magic-worker to my will;
So mastered her and all her wisdom's pride

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ing

That to me she revealed her inmost mind,
Speaking sooth-saying to my very ear.
And I rewarded her with precious pledge,
For this the wisest woman of the world
Bore thee, the fair Brunnhilda, unto me,
And thy eight sisters, raised and trained with
thee.

Through these Valkyrie and their valiant work
I hope to find escape from awful doom,
And save the utter ruin of the gods,—
The Æsir and their dark, impending fate.
This was my plan, as thou dost know full well:
That foes might find us strong for every strife,
I bade my strong Valkyrie to ride forth
And bring me heroes from each battle field,
So that a growing band of hero souls
Might hail me in Valhalla's lofty halls."

And taking up his word Brunnhilda spake:
"Yea, and thy halls right valiantly we filled,
And many heroes I myself have brought.
Why, then, thy sadness and thy heavy care,
For we have never slackened in our work?"

But Wotan sighed: "Another woe has come,
For listen well what Erda hath forewarned.
She told me of the night, the doom, the end
Of gods, and all through Alberich's dark host.
Yet now I fear him not, nor his swart slaves,—
Yea, though the Nibelung is hot with wrath,—
For these my heroes hold my throne secure.
But this the baneful threat and dire mis-
chance,—

If Alberich again should clutch the ring,

Then were our high Valhalla lost to us.
For only he who cursed and cast off love
Can use for ill the magic of the ring;
And he whose heart is now unending hate
Will use its matchless power for desperate
deeds,

And overwhelm the gods in endless shame.
He would beguile my heroes from my side;
He would transform my best friends into foes,
And force them by his craft to my defeat.
So I must set myself with every care
To keep the ring from his accursed clutch.
The giant Fafner holds the golden hoard,—
Our compact gave both giants this vast
wealth,

But one to gain it all the other slew,—
Therefore from Fafner we must force the ring,
Although to him I gave it as a wage.
Yet how to wrest it is my care and fret.
My compact with him doth restrain my arm,
And all in vain against him is my might.
These are the chains that thrall and chafe me
sore.

Through laws am I the chief and sovereign
lord,

By these same laws am I a bounden slave.
But one will come,— I feel it in my soul,—
One who will dare what I can never dare;
One whom I need not help, a Hero strong,
A stranger to the gods, unclaimed by them,
Untaught of them, and under no restraint,
Who by his own designs and from his needs
Shall work the mighty deed my heart has
hoped.

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ing

Yet ne'er before my tongue has dared to speak,
Although the wish was ever in my soul.

Where can this one be found,— this friendliest
foe

Who seems against the gods, yet fights for
me?

How can I mould a free man to my will,
Yet never give him my protecting shield?

How can I know that giving him full rein,
Still can I hold him faithful unto me?

How can I master this soul, not mine own,
Who working for himself, shall work my will?

This is the woe divine that bears me down,
This is the desperate need that frets my soul.

Each deed I do, another end I seek,

And yet the longed-for end I seek in vain,

For this free hero must in freedom work,

And now I see around me none but slaves."

Brunnhilda asked: "But what of Siegmund
there,—

That Volsung seems to work his own free
will?"

Wotan made answer: "Yea, my hope was
there,

And long roved I with him the forests wild,
Rousing his hate against the heavenly laws,
And made him free from every god and man.

Only one thing I did that worked him woe,—

Gave to his hand a mighty sword, a gift

Of one god 'gainst the rancor of the gods.

Alas, how lightly I deceived myself!

Already Fricka has discerned my schemes,

Already thrust me into deeper shame,
And swift compelled me to uphold the law,
And, slave to law, to work her righteous will."

Quickly Brunnhilda asked: "What canst thou
do,—
From Siegmund must thou snatch the vic-
tory?"

And Wotan cried in outburst of despair:
"The curse is on me, yea, it is the woe
That clutched me when I snatched the glitter-
ing gold
And wrested from swart Alberich his ring.
For now what I love best I must give up;
And I must slay him whom I hold most dear,
And him who trusts me, I must foul betray.
O how the lordly glory fades from me,
And heavenly splendor turns to swift disgrace!
To ruin crashes all I proudly reared;
My work and life are over. Only waits
One thing,— the doom, the death, the endless
night."

Sunk in sad thought, he paused. Then slowly
spake:
"And for that dismal doom waits Alberich,
Whetting his ire in glutting o'er my shame.
Now do I understand the depths of woe
In those wild words of Erda which she spake:
'When the black foe of love begets a son,
Then soon shall end the sway of heavenly
gods.'
For rumor says that Alberich the dwarf

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ing

Has dragged to him a woman by his gold,
And on her now is hung the fruit of hate,
A loveless babe, born hating from the womb.
He who has hated love has wrought his will,
And now has one to further his deep hate;
But I who freely and most deeply love,
Yet lack the hero who shall work my will.
Of all my dear love-children where is he,
The free one, who can help me in my need?"

And as he spake, in wrath he bubbled o'er:
"Here take my blessing, Nibelung's curst son!
What now I deeply loathe I fling to thee,—
The worthless baubles of the heavenly gods,
Valhalla and the glories of the heights,—
Consume them with thy vile and greedy hate!"

Then did new terror strike Brunnhilda's heart,
And blanch her face, yet longingly she cried:
"O tell me, Father, what thy child may do?"

Spake Wotan bitterly: "Heed Fricka's wish,—
Defend and champion her virgin vows.
What she commands that also I command.
How worthless is the fruit of my own will,
Since no free hero comes to work my wish!
Therefore do I decree—woe bide the day!—
That thou must fight for Fricka and her
knave."

Broke in Brunnhilda: "O I do beseech,
Take back this fatal word! O woe is me!
Thou lovest Siegmund, and for thy great love—
I know it—I must shield the Volsung well!"

Stern, Wotan answered, full against his heart:
"Nay, Siegmund thou must vanquish, —'t is
my word, —

And victory to Hunding must be given!
But guard thee well, and arm thyself with
might,

Bring all thy prowess to the coming fray,
For Siegmund wields a sword most notable,
And his quick skill will test thy fullest
strength."

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ing

Brunnhilda spake: "Well have I learned from
thee

To love and bless what thy dear heart doth
love;

From him whom thy affection holds most dear
No formal words of thine can move my shield!"

Whereat with seeming wrath, great Wotan
cried:

"What, froward child! thou floutest my com-
mands?

What art thou but the blind hand of my will?

My grief I told thee, — have I sunk so low

That now thy woman's heart defieth me,

And challengest thy father's fatal wrath?

Thy vaunted courage would be weak and wan

If at thee struck the lightning of my rage.

Hark, child, there burneth wrath within my
breast,

Enough to wreck and ruin the whole world,

Which now is smiling in my favoring love.

Woe be to all on whom my wrath shall fall;

Affliction shall repay all insolence.

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ing

I warn thee,—do not wake my vengeful ire.
Remember well my heavenly decree,—
Sigmund must fall! Brunnhilda works my
will!"

With these stern words, he rushed like tem-
pest forth

Among the gloomy mountains, and was gone.
In silent terror and a dread amaze
Brunnhilda long stood still, then wondering
spake:

"Ne'er have I seen my sire in such strange
mood,
Though oft before deep shaken by fierce
wrath."

Sadly she stooped and took her weapons up
And donned them, as with troubled heart she
cried:

"How dull and heavy is this armor now,
Which, when I loved the fray, was bright with
joy!

To-day this battle bodeth heavy woe!"
Awhile she sat in thought, and sighed full oft.
Then she arose and muttered in despair:

"Woe, woe, my Volsung! In thy dire distress
Thy faithful friend must faithless be to thee."

While thus she spake, she saw far down the
vale

A wandering pair, approaching eagerly
And mounting from the valley to the heights.
With earnest gaze she watched them for a
while

Until they nearer came, and her quick eyes
Discerned strong Siegmund, with his stalwart
tread,

And fair Sieglinda, walking at his side.

Then passed Brunnhilda into the dark cave
Where she had hid her steed, and waited there,
Enshrouded in the shadows of the rocks.

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ing

Soon Siegmund and Sieglinda reached the
height

Where the path broadens on the rocky slope.
Fain would she press her way with eager haste,
But Siegmund sought to hold her with the
words:

"Rest here a moment, love. Pray, ease thy
steps."

But she cried: "Further! further!" in wild
haste.

Then spake he lovingly and clasped her arms:
"No further now! Why all this headlong
chase?"

Scarce can I follow thee in thy wild flight
Through wood and field, o'er roughest fell and
crag;

Spellbound and speechless thou dost speed
away;

Nor may my voice allure thee from thy haste,
Nor stay thee for a moment to repose."

She listened not, but all distraught seemed she,
And stared before her into vacancy,
And yet with wildness and a weird surprise,
As if in some great moment of fierce love
The ecstasy had stolen forth her soul,

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ing

And left her tender eyes all passionless.
Still clasping her to hold her to repose,
Siegmund had led her to a rocky seat.
Softly he soothed and softly spake to her:
"Now rest thee here, my heart, and speak to
me,
And end this awful silence by sweet words.
'Tis Siegmund holds thee close and guards
thee well!"

Strangely she gazed into his loving face,
Then for a moment fire of rapture flashed
In her bright eyes,— and all was dark again;
Mournfully hung she round his neck, forlorn.
Anon she started up with sudden fear,
And cried in terror, thrusting him away:
"Away! away! flee from me, I am vile!
Unholy are these arms that clasped thee
round!

Yet in thy tender love I found delight,
In thy embrace all rapture filled my soul.
Yea, thou most surely wert my destined love,
For only thou hast wakened all my heart.
O why from this sweet wealth of heavenly joy,
Which all my soul and senses overwhelmed,
Should such awakening come? A shudder
struck

With awful terror to my traitorous heart
Because of him to whom I still belong
By law, altho' I served him without love.
Now in my lawless bonds am I accursed.
Leave me! O leave me, and flee far away!
I am accursed."

But Siegmund cried in wrath:

"That so-called husband who first wrought
thee woe,
His blood shall pay for all his vengeful work!
So fly no further, — I will wait him here!
And here before me shall he cringe and fall
When my sword Help-Need pierces his black
heart,
And thou shalt have revenge for all thy woe!"

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ing

So spake he. Quickly from her rocky seat
Sieglinde, now upstarting, stood in fear
And listened, anxious, crying in alarm:
"Harken! the horns, — O hear their hateful call!
Nearer they sound, the welkin rings with them,
And from the wood and vale wild voices cry.
'Tis Hunding — Hunding wakened from his
sleep!

He calls his yeomen and his fiercest hounds,
And for his cause the rabble rouse and shout,
And call on highest Heaven to avenge
Polluted vows and broken marriage-bonds!"

Mirthless she laughed aloud; then with a cry
She fell in Siegmund's arms. He held her close,
And whispered soothing words: "Courage, be-
loved!"

But she nor heard his voice nor felt his touch;
So still she lay it seemed that soothing death
Had breathed upon her, giving peace at last.
But Siegmund listened, with his head close
down

Upon her breast and heard her gentle breath,
And knew she was alive. Slowly he sank
Upon the ground, and rested on his lap

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ing

Her gentle head; and thus they long remained,
He watching with all care as soft she slept,
And pressing on her brow a lingering kiss.

Then in the silence and the wreathing mists
Forth from the cave Brunnhilda slowly came,
Leading her steed. Anon she paused and gazed
With solemn eyes at Siegmund. Nearer come,
Full long and earnestly she looked, deep grief
Out-peering from her eyes. Then slow she
spake:

"Siegmund! dost thou behold me? I am here
To call thee hence into another world."

Then Siegmund turned and looked, and seeing
her

Shining majestic, boldly spake to her:

"Who art thou, thus so beautiful and stern?"

Softly she answered: "Only am I seen
By eyes that soon must close in fated death;
Who sees me soon will lose the light of life,
Before or on the furious battle field.
The warrior sees me, and forthwith he knows
That fate has sealed him to go hence with me."

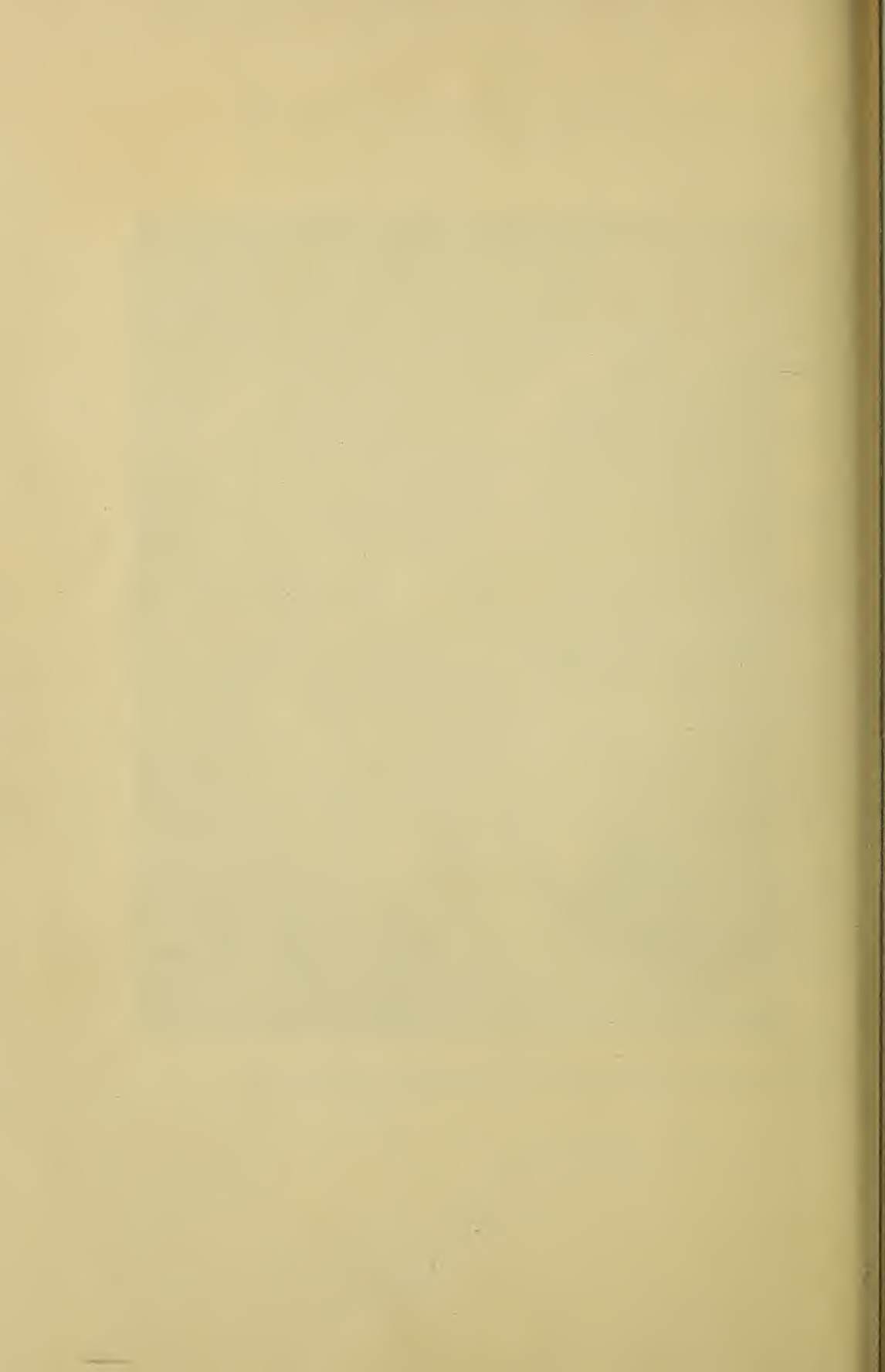
Then Siegmund gazed into her solemn eyes,
Low bowed his head in thought, and at the last
Turned to her earnestly, and calmly asked:
"And whither takest thou—pray tell me
true—

The hero that doth follow at thy call?"

Brunnhilda answered: "To great Wotan first,



BRUNNHILDA AND THE LOVERS



For he hath chosen thee,—it is his will,—
I lead thee, and Valhalla waits for thee!”

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

And Siegmund asked: “And shall I haply find
Great Wotan only in Valhalla’s heights?”

Spake she: “Nay, thou shalt also find with him
The glorious band of heroes slain in fight;
These shall surround thee, greeting thee with
joy.”

He asked again: “In those Valhalla halls,
My noble sire, the Volsung, shall I find?”

Spake she: “The Volsung thou shalt surely
find!”

Still further did he ply her with his words:
“And in Valhalla shall Sieglinda be?”

She answered: “Fair wish-maidens greet thee
there,
And Wotan’s daughter serves the heavenly
mead.”

Yet Siegmund cried: “Nay, tell me but one
thing.

As thou art high and holy, Wotan’s child,—
For so I ween thou art,—now speak me true:
Shall Siegmund find Sieglinda in those
heights?”

Sadly Brunnhilda answered: “Nay, not yet;
Here must she linger on the earth awhile.
Sieglinda in Valhalla greets thee not!”

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

And at her word Siegmund turned full away,
Bent gently o'er Sieglinda, kissed her brow
With loving tenderness. Awhile was still,
Then fierce he cried: "Valhalla greet for me,
And mighty Wotan, and my Volsung sire,
And all the heroes, yea, greet me them all,
And the wish-maidens, fair and nobly born;
But severed from this maid, I follow not!"

Then pitying tears bedewed the mentor's eyes,
But stern she spake: "Thou hast beheld the
face

Of dreaded Valkyr, felt her fatal glance,—
Fate hath decreed that thou must follow me."

But Siegmund cried: "Where my Sieglinda
bides,

Come weal, come woe, there Siegmund bides
with her.

The sight of thee shall never make me quail,
Nor move me from my best belovèd here."

Brunnhilda spake: "As long as life doth last
Dauntless thou art; but what when death
draws nigh?

I come to tell thee that thine hour is here."

"And if that hour be come," the warrior cried,
"Who is the hero that shall lay me low?"

"Hunding," she answered; "he shall lay thee
low."

Scornful he spake: "Bring stronger menace
here

Than Hunding and his poor and puny power,
For I propose to slay him in the fight.
Swoopest thou here, O Valkyr, for thy prey? —
Then straightway choose this Hunding for
thy spoil."

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

Shaking her head, Brunnhilda bade him cease:
"Harken, thou Volsung, heed and mark me
well, —
Thou art the one to-day decreed to death!"

But Siegmund still stood firm: "Look on this
sword!

He who hath fashioned it, and made it mine,
Will seal it with invincible success,
And I defy thee, — dauntless in its strength."

"Rash man!" the Valkyr said with haughty
voice.

"He who hath given thee the sword now dooms
Thee unto death; and even from the sword
He now withdraws the charm invincible."

But Siegmund warning spake: "O softly now!
Disturb not with thy words my slumbering
love."

Over Sieglinda tenderly he bent
In deepest anguish, and the blinding tears
Bedimmed his loving eyes, as soft he spake:
"Wake not to woe, thou gentle slumberer;
Against thy peace the whole world seems to
war.

And I on whom thou leanest in thy need,
For whom alone thou didst all else forsake,

**The
Day of
Reckon-
ing**

I may no longer shield or shelter thee,
But must forsake thee in the fateful hour.
O shame on him who wrought for me this
sword,
And shaped it for my ruin and disgrace!
If I must die, I scorn Valhalla's heights;
Let me descend to Hella's dark abode."

Brunnhilda spake: "So lightly dost thou spurn
Celestial splendors and eternal bliss?
Is this one woman everything to thee,—
This poor weak woman, faint and pitiful,
Who lies so worn and trembling in thine arms.
Holdest thou nothing dear on earth but her?"

Now as Brunnhilda spake these cruel words,
Siegmund looked bitterly at her, and cried:
"How youthful and how fair thy face appears,
Yet, O thy heart, how hard and cold it is!
Canst thou not help me, quickly be thou gone,
Dread warrior maid, unfeeling and unkind.
Hath my deep grief no pity in thee stirred,
Then freely feast thy joy on my despair,
And let my woe refresh thy hardened heart.
But of Valhalla and its paltry bliss,
Tell me no more,—I scorn it utterly."

Deep moved and troubled, fair Brunnhilda
cried:
"Yea, I have seen thy heart's most dire dis-
tress,
And I have felt the hero's heavy woe.
Hark, Siegmund, thy dear one entrust to me,
Safe shall she be 'neath my protecting shield."

But Siegmund cried: "None but myself alone;
While life I have, defends my best beloved;
And if stern fate shall doom me to the death,
Her sleeping will I slay before I die."

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

High flashed the sword aloft at these rash
words,

With full intent to prove its wielder's mood,
Had not Brunnhilda, all her nature roused,
And moved by stormy depth of sympathy,
Made stern resolve to follow Wotan's heart
And not his words, and eagerly she called:
"Forbear, O Volsung! harken to my words!
Sieglinga shall yet live, and thou with her.
It is decreed. Thy death-fate I reverse,
And to thee, Siegmund, give I victory."

Now as she spake there came the call of horns
Upon the wind, and listening, she cried:
"Hark thou the coming challenge of the
horns!

Now, my brave hero, arm thee for the fray!
Trust thy great sword, and swing it with thy
might!

Be confident of this thy sure defence,—
For the strong Valkyr shields thee with her
power.

Farewell, O Siegmund! hero stout of heart,
I will be with thee on the battle field."

Away she rushed, and with her war-like steed
Was lost to view within the mountain gorge,
And Siegmund, late so sad, was filled with joy
At her fair promises and kindly words.

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

Now came a shrouding darkness on the
heights,
And heavy storm-clouds veiled the cliffs and
peaks,
And in the blackness blatant blasts of horns
Signalled a near approach of hurrying foes.

Then Siegmund bent above the sleeping girl
And gently whispered: "Soft the soothing spell
Of slumber that hath charmed my fair one's
woe.

Perchance the noble Valkyr breathed on her
Some magic spell of heavenly quietness,
Else had these warlike horns aroused her fears
And filled with sad disquiet her dear heart.
How still she sleeps,—as still as sleeping
death,—

And yet she lives and breathes, and oft she
dreams,

And smiles in dreams as if in fairest bliss."
(The clamor of the horns yet louder grew.)
"So slumber on in peace, until the strife
Is o'er, the victory won."

Therewith he bent
And kissed her brow in lingering farewell.
Meanwhile the call of horns insistent grew,
And starting up he left her, with the cry:
"Let him who calls so fierce, now stand his
ground!

What he demands that shall I stoutly pay!
My good sword Help-Need shall deal out his
due!"

So speaking, quick he hastened toward his
foes,

And in the mountain pass was lost to sight.

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

Sieglinda stirred, and murmured in her dreams:
"And has not yet my father come back home?
Still hunting in the forests with his boy?
Mother! my mother! how my heart doth fear!
These strangers are no friends—their looks
are hate!

O clouds of smoke that roll against the sky!
O tongues of flame that lick our roof-tree up!
They burn and slay! O help me, brother, help!
O Siegmund! Siegmund!"

Meanwhile a quick flame
Of jagged lightning broke the gloomy clouds,
And with an awful stroke the thunder crashed;
Whereat Sieglinda wakened with a start,
Still on her lips the cry, "O Siegmund, help!"
Then stared around in terror and dismay,
For all was darkness and thick tempest
clouds;

Now came a blinding flash of sheeted flame,
And now the deafening roar of thunder blasts
In tumult of a mighty mountain storm.
Then 'mid a lull, she heard the blaring horns,
And Hunding's harsh voice calling from a
peak:

"Where's Woeful? Let him stand and face
the fight,
Or must I come and hunt him with my hounds?"

And farther off, came Siegmund's angry voice:
"Where art thou hiding, craven, from my
sight?

Come forth that I may face thee to thy death!"

**The
Day of
Reckon-
ing**

Sieglinda heard them, and in terror spake:
"Tis Hunding,—yea, and Siegmund—and
they fight!
Would I might see, and stay their maddened
swords!"

Again harsh Hunding's voice broke on the
night:
"Hither, thou faithless guest, accursèd foe!
The righteous Fricka gives thee for my prey!"

But Siegmund's voice was heard, defying him:
"Thou foolish wretch, think me not weapon-
less,
Nor prate of woman's help! Fight for thyself,
Full soon will Fricka leave thee to thy fate!
Behold my weapon! 'T is from thine own house,
And from the mighty ash-tree's harboring stem
Undaunted did I draw this matchless sword!
Soon shalt thou taste its sharpness to the
full!"

A moment and the lightning flashed and flared,
And on a rocky crag above the pass
Hunding and Siegmund fought with sounding
strokes,
Their ringing blows new tumult in the storm.
And at the sight, the fair Sieglinda rose
With strength of terror, crying, "Madmen,
stay
Your hands! O slay me first!"

Then suddenly
Within the glare of light above the strife
She saw the warrior maid Brunnhilda soar,

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

And shelter Siegmund with her mighty shield.
She heard her eager voice exhorting him:
"Slay him, O Siegmund! Trust thy dauntless
sword!"

Whereat fierce Siegmund aimed a mighty
stroke,
When lo, a sudden light broke through the
clouds,
And mighty Wotan stood in majesty
Protecting Hunding, while his hostile spear
Was turned on Siegmund, with the deep com-
mand:

"Back from my spear! Be splintered, reckless
sword!"

And as the chief of gods gave stern decree,
Brunnhilda fled in terror with her shield,
And Siegmund's sword was snapped on Wo-
tan's spear.

Then Hunding, rushing with a mighty lunge,
Buried his weapon in brave Siegmund's breast.
Down to the earth he fell. Sieglinda heard
His death-cry, and a sudden lifeless swoon
In mercy interposed.

 Upon the height
The glare of light quick faded, and the gloom
Covered the tragic struggle with its pall.
Brunnhilda, in the cover of the clouds,
Hurried to poor Sieglinda with the cry:
"To horse, to horse, that I may rescue thee!"
And lifted her upon her own fleet steed
And spurred away, and soon was lost to view.

Then for a moment came a sudden rift,

The
Day of
Reckon-
ing

And in the heavy clouds a gleam of light.
There the rough Hunding over Siegmund bent,
And from his breast drew forth the dripping
sword.

While high upon the crag great Wotan stood
Leaning upon his spear, and full of grief,
As sorrowful he gazed on Siegmund's form.
To Hunding turned he with the scornful
words:

"Begone, thou knave! Before great Fricka
kneel,

And tell her how my faithful spear avenged
What she esteemed a slight. Get hence, I say!"
In deep contempt he spake, and waved his
hand

At Hunding, and the wretch sank down and
died.

Then said the Thunderer in anger sad:

"What means Brunnhilda, scorner of my word?
My vengeance this defiance must repay.
Yea, fell the scourging she must have from me
If my fleet steed should meet her in her flight."

A flash of lightning broke to lurid flame,
A mighty crash of thunder answered him,
As vengeful Wotan leaped upon his steed,
And in the storm and darkness rode away.

PART III: PROMISED REDEMPTION

PROMISED REDEMPTION



OW as the clouds are rifted on the heights

Into this open space of sloping rock,
Tumultuous gather four strong war-

rior maids,

The bold Valkyrie. Gorgeously they flash
In splendid armor, helmets, shields and spears.

They hold as sentinels the jagged rocks
That rise austere in grandeur on all sides.

Below the crag, a yawning cave gapes wide
To serve as great-roofed hall and gathering-
place;

Fronting the cave a forest virgin wild
Of towering pine, and hemlock tall and dark.
Between the cave and woods lies broad the
space

Where opens broad the view from peak to peak
Across the black ravines and rugged crags;
From these bare rocks upon the outer edge
Falls a great precipice with sheer descent
A thousand feet of seamed and heaped-up rock.

The tumult of the storm has scarcely ceased
When the wide chasm echoes with the cries
Of the war maidens to their sisters bold.

Now on a rocky peak, Gerhilda called:

"Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!

Helmviga, hail! Speed hither on thy steed!"

And as she called, a flash of lightning sped
From passing cloud, and gleaming in the air,
Riding along the storm blasts on her steed,
Was seen a Valkyr strong, and warlike clad.

Upon her saddle hung a stalwart form,—
Some hero gathered from the battle field;
And as she neared she gave the signal call:
“Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!”
And all the others hailed her with the shout:
“Heiho! heiho! hoyotoho! heiho!”

Ortlinda called: “Picket thy steed near mine,—
Thy brown, I know, will pasture with my gray,
And keep the peace, as friendly steeds and true.”

Valtrauta asked: “Who on thy pommel
hangs?”

And grim Helmviga near the pine woods
spake:
“Sintolt the Hegeling, a warrior brave;
And on Ortlinda’s pommel hangs a form,—
Vittig the Irming, once his fiercest foe.”

Gerhilda said: “These twain, I knew, were foes.”

Scarce had she spoken when with anxious cry
Ortlinda started up and ran with haste,
Shouting: “Heiho! heiho! the steeds are now
at war,—
Thy steed, Helmviga, snarls and stamps at
mine.”

The other sisters laughed aloud. One spake:
“The horses carry on the heroes’ feud!”
Helmviga called out to her angry steed:
“Be quiet, Brownie! Wilt thou break the
peace?”

A further signal from the mountain peak,

And fair Valtrauta, now the watcher, called:
"Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!
Siegruna comes! Where hast thou stayed so
long?"

Promised
Redemp-
tion

Quick through the air another warrior maid
Drew near, swift riding on her wingèd steed,
And at her saddle hung a hero slain.
While drawing near still other voices cried,
And as the flashing lightning bright illumed
The banks of cloud still other maids were seen
Upon their steeds, each with a warrior's corse.
And all the fair Valkyrie raised a shout:
"Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!
Rossvisa and Grimmerda, welcome both!
A double greeting to this valiant twain."

Rossvisa asked: "Now all are gathered here,
What need to tarry longer on this crag?
To fair Valhalla let us wend our way,
And bring these heroes into Wotan's halls."

Helmviga answered: "Nay, but eight are we;
All are not here,—our band is not complete.
Brunnhilda lingers near the Volsung pair."

Then spake thus fair Valtrauta: "Yea, 't is true,
Here must we tarry till she comes to us;
Wotan would give scant greeting to our band
Should we appear, and no Brunnhilda there."

Then from the topmost peak, Siegruna called:
"Hoyotoho! hoyotoho! heiho!
Behold! I see Brunnhilda spurring fast!

Promised
Redemp-
tion

How pants and snorts her horse in labored haste!

Never a Valkyr saw I ride so fast.

But what is hanging to her saddle-bow?

No hero is it,—nay, 't is but a maid.

Where found she such? And wherefore bring her here?

Nearer, without a greeting, draws she on.

Heiho! Brunnhilda! dost thou hear us not?

Now she alights in safety in the woods,

Her stalwart steed has sunk exhausted down.

See! from the saddle lifts she the pale maid."

Quickly the fair Valkyrie rushed to help,

With cries, "O sister, what is thy distress?"

And spake the words of greeting in her ear,

And sympathy and sisterly fair love.

They led her from the woods, as slow she brought

The fair Sieglinda, holding her frail form

By her own arm, strong arm of stalwart help.

Eager, and speaking breathlessly, she cried:

"O sisters, shield me, for I ask your aid!

O shield me in my need and dire distress!"

Then asked they: "Why such wild and furious haste?

Such flight the guilty make accursèd deep."

Brunnhilda spake: "Yea, and such flight is mine,—

For the first time my very life is sought,

And who but mighty Wotan hunts me down!"



A VALKYR

In sudden terror the Valkyrie cried:
"Thou art distraught! Speak! Surely thou art
mad!

Wotan our father follows thee in wrath?
From him thou fleest in this desperate fear?"

Promised
Redemp-
tion

Distressed she cried: "O sisters, scale the peak
And spy to northward whether Wotan comes.
Tell me whene'er your eyes have sight of
him."

Ortlinda scaled the peak and peered, and cried:
"I see a thunderstorm drive from the north."

And fair Valtrauta looked and quickly called:
"Yea, heavy clouds are gathering thick and
fast."

Then shouted all the others: "Lo, 't is he,—
'Tis Wotan storming hither with swift
steeds."

Sadly Brunnhilda cried: "Ah! swift he comes!
He comes like savage hunter for his prey;
From northward draws he near in hot pursuit.
Shield me, my sisters, and shield well this
maid."

Questioned they then: "Truly, what maid is
this?"

And full of haste Brunnhilda answered them:
"Brief words I speak,—Sieglinde is her name.
One of the Volsung pair, and lovers true,

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

But on them Wotan now pours fiercest wrath.
He had decreed that in the fray to-day
From Siegmund I must wrest the victory;
But in defiance of the stern decree,
Knowing great Wotan's inmost wish and hope,
I dared to shield him with my own strong
shield.

Then Wotan came, put forth his fateful spear
And Siegmund fell, and far away fled I
With fair Sieglinda, snatching her from death.
O we beseech your help, my sisters dear!
Defend us from the might of Wotan's blows."

In consternation, the Valkyrie cried:
"Our sister, dost thou know thy desperate deed?
Brunnhilda, woe to thee, and woe to us!
Didst thou defy and break great Wotan's
law?"

They wept and wailed with her in heavy grief.
Sudden Valtrauta shouted from the crag:
"See! dark the tempest nears like shuddering
night!"

And fair Ortlanda cried with anxious words:
"Behold the storm-clouds rage as black as
death!"

Brunnhilda shrieked in terror at the storm:
"Woe to Sieglinda if dread Wotan strikes,
For he has doomed this Volsung pair to death!
O who of you will lend me now a steed,
That I may snatch this poor maid from her
doom?"

But answered the Valkyrie: "What! wouldst
thou
Lead us to rash defiance like thine own?"

Promised
Redemp-
tion

Brunnhilda pleaded: "O Rossvisa dear,
Lend me thy steed, fleet-footed as the wind!"

But swift she spake: "Nay, never yet in fear
Has my fleet steed before great Wotan fled!"

Then to another sister quick she prayed:
"Helmviga, hear me! I beseech thy help!"

But she replied: "Nay, Wotan's part take I!"

In desperation, fair Brunnhilda cried:
"Will no one of my sisters heed my woe?
Valtrauta, haste! Gerhilda, lend thine aid!
Ortlinda, pity! O Siegruna, help!
Behold this deep distress and be my friends,
As I have been most dear and true to you!
O help me save this sad ill-fated girl!"

She ceased and clasped Sieglinda in her arms,
Protectingly, and that poor stricken soul,
Who had been gazing in dread vacancy,—
The picture of despair and utter woe,—
Now started up, and suddenly she cried:
"Nay, do not suffer peril for my sake,
And do not feel such sorrow for my fate,
For death is sweet and near and dear to me,—
'Tis death alone can help me in my need.
Who was it bade thee snatch me from my
doom?—

For in that awful strife I might have fall'n

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

From that same blade by which my Siegmund
fell.

Dying with him, with him I should have been!
But now so far, so far, O Siegmund dear!

Come, death, o'erwhelm me! Come, forgetful-
ness!

Hold, thou war maiden! If thou wouldst not
court

My curses, grant to me this one fond prayer,—
Strike deep thy sword and ease this suffering
heart!"

But looking in her eyes, Brunnhilda pled:

"Nay, live, true heart! Live for the sake of
love!

Live for the Volsung pledge now left with
thee!"

E'en as she spake the lightning clove the sky;
Nearer the thunder rolled; the gathering
storm

Broke, as tempestuous Wotan rode in wrath.
Valtrauta from the lofty crag sang forth:

"The raging storm is drawing swiftly near!"

"Hence with the woman!" shrill the murmur
rose.

"Unpitying wrath is moving on her track;
We dare not hazard all to give her aid."

Whereat Sieglinda fell upon her knees

Before Brunnhilda, and in agony

She cried: "O rescue me, thou warlike maid!

Protect me for the life that is to be!"

For one swift moment in deep anxious thought
Brunnhilda paused, then rising in her might,
Her whole soul full of strong resolve, she
cried:

Promised
Redemp-
tion

"Sieglingda, flee with haste, and by thyself,
For here I stay to meet great Wotan's wrath!
Here will I dare him, let his rage break here,—
While thou shalt flee and save thee from his
hate."

Sieglingda asked: "But whither shall I flee?"

Brunnhilda to her sisters turned and spake:
"Which sister lately to the eastward sped?"

Siegruna answered: "To the east went I,
And there I found a forest-tangled close,
Where the grim giant Fafner hides in gloom,
And guards the swarthy Nibelung's great
hoard."

Spake fair Svertleita: "Yea, the giant wretch
Has shaped himself into a dragon-form,
And in a gruesome cave he keepeth watch
Over his hoard and Alberich's red ring."

Grimgerda added: "This dread eastern land
Is no safe haven for a helpless wife."

Brunnhilda answered: "Yea, the very place;
This forest will be shield from Wotan's wrath.
He hates the spot and shuns it evermore;
He doth abhor and loathe it. 'T is the place. . . .
Flee swiftly, dear heart! Speed thee to the east!

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

Be brave to bear the trials that must come,
Hunger and thirst, the thorns and stony
paths;
And smile through woe and all thy pangs and
pains.
For this one thing heed well and hold in
heart,—
There bides within thee, loving suffering one,
The noblest hero that this world shall see!"

Therewith Brunnhilda thrust into her hands
The broken bits of Siegmund's mighty sword
With the quick words: "Yea, keep for him
these shreds,—
The shattered fragments of great Siegmund's
blade.
By happy chance I saved them from the field
When his great father fell. Anon renewed
This mighty sword the son shall proudly
swing.
Yea, yet unborn, his name do I declare.
Siegfried,—victorious one,—his name shall
be."

And in all awe Sieglinda murmured soft:
"O holiest wonder and most glorious maid!
What trust and comfort hast thou brought my
heart!
Henceforth I live for him whom we do love,
And seek to save his secret pledge of love.
My gratitude bring rich reward to thee,
And only blessing to thee. Fare thee well."

Therewith she fled away into the night;

Far to the east she hasted, wending fast,—
A great joy filling her with new-born strength,
A great hope lifting her on mighty wings.

Promised
Redemp-
tion

Meanwhile the mountain heights were black
with storm,
The heavy thunder heaped up clouds in rage,
And in the darkness and the rushing winds,
And through the muttered rumblings and the
crash
Of sheeted flame, a mighty voice was heard,—
A fiery presence 'mid the hemlocks shone,—
And Wotan thundered fierce: "Brunnhilda,
stay!"

Dismayed the fair Valkyrie muttered low:
"Dread Wotan and his raging steed are come!
Woe, woe to thee, Brunnhilda, in this wrath!"

Whereat Brunnhilda, faint with fear, cried out:
"O sisters, help! My spirit sinks in me!
His wrath will crush me if ye shield me not!"

Deeply compassionate for her dark woe
Quick called they out: "Hither, thou lost one.
Come,

Lest thou be seen. Hide closely in our midst,
And be thou silent though thy name be called."
Upon the crag they gathered in a group,—
Brunnhilda hidden close within their midst,—
And as the storm broke mightily, they cried:
"Woe! woe! Great Wotan swings down from
his steed!

Hither he strides, impatient for revenge!"

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

Hot in his wrath, great Wotan fiercely strode
Until he reached them. Then most sternly
asked:

"Where is Brunnhilda? Where is the accursed?
Dare ye to shield her from my just revenge?"

Gently they answered: "Dread are thy de-
crees,
O Father, but what evil have we done
To stir thee up to such a storm of rage?"

Spake Wotan: "Would ye all defy me here?
Beware, ye foolish ones! I know all things.
Brunnhilda thinks to hide from my keen eyes;
Give her no further aid,—she is accursed.
She dared to brook my will and Heaven's law."

Cried they: "'T is true, for unto us she fled,
And sought our shield with piteous sad pray-
ers;
In silent fear she now beholds thy wrath.
For her we plead, our sister sore distressed;
We plead that thy fierce fury may abate."

But Wotan spake: "Soft-hearted woman brood,
Had ye such weakened spirit from your sire?
For fighting and for toil I tempered you,
And steeled your souls for hardness and dis-
tress;

And now, like minions, do ye moan and groan,
When sternly I chastise this breach of faith.
So hear ye, whimperers, what she hath wrought
For whom ye weep so tremulous in tears.
None but Brunnhilda knew the inmost thought

Enshrouded in my bosom's sacred shrine,
Nor knew the secret fountains of my will
Close hidden in my spirit's darkest depths;
She only caught the impulse of my wish
And worked it out for me in nobler way.
Now hath she broken down this holy bond
When, faithless, she defied my sovereign will
And open scorned my heavenly decrees;
Yea, turned against me what my love bestowed,—

The very weapons that my grace had given.
Dost hear, Brunnhilda, what is my complaint?
Thou whom I gladly clothed with garb of war,—
With byrnie, helm and glaive, and all the rest,—
Thou whom I crowned with glory and with grace,
Yea, gave thee name and life, prowess and might,
How canst thou hear me making my complaint,
And hope to hide thee from my righteous wrath?"

Among the fair Valkyrie came a stir,
And out there stepped Brunnhilda from the throng.
With downcast eyes, but firm in soul, she walked
Down from the crag, along the rocky pass,
And stood before great Wotan with the words:
"Here am I, Father! Speak the word of doom!"

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

And Wotan answered: "Nay, I punish not!
'Tis thou thyself must give thyself thy doom.
It was my will that wakened thee to life,
And yet against my will is all thy war.
Thy life it was fulfilling my behests,
And now my plain commands thou hast defied.
Thou wert a fair Wish-Maiden unto me,
Against me hast thou turned my spoken wish;
Thou wert a strong Shield-Maiden unto me,
But now against me hast thou raised thy
shield;
Thou wert a brave Lot-Chooser unto me,
Yet now hast chosen lot against my choice;
Thou wert a Hero-Stirrer unto me,
Against me thou hast stirred thy hero's strife.
What thou hast been, have Wotan's lips now
said,
What thou shalt be, thine own lips may pro-
nounce.
Thou art Wish-Maiden nevermore to me,
And my dear Valkyr art thou nevermore,—
Henceforth be only what thou know'st thou
art."

In sudden terror, pale Brunnhilda shrieked:
"Dost thou disown me, outcast evermore?—
O Father, do I read thy thought aright?"

And Wotan spake, full sorrowful and slow:
"Yea, nevermore to do my high behests
Shalt thou fare proudly from Valhalla's halls;
And nevermore shalt thou at word of mine
Bid noble warriors to the festal board;
And nevermore shalt thou from battle fields,

Bring valiant heroes to enrich my halls;
And nevermore, when all the gods are met,
Shalt thou the flagon pass at heavenly feasts;
Yea, nevermore my lips with love shall press
The tender sweetness of thy childlike mouth.
Thou art shut out from all the heavenly hosts,
Banned and degraded from the godlike race,
Broken and void are all our bonds with thee,
Exiled and banished from us evermore."

Promised
Redemp-
tion

With loud lamenting, the Valkyrie wailed:
"O woe and horror! Sister, woe to thee!"

Deep stunned, Brunnhilda asked in pleading
voice:

"Thou canst not mean it, Father,—this dread
doom.

All that thy love bestowed thou takest back?"

But Wotan answered: "Yea, the doom is fixed,
Thy lord doth now withdraw all gifts from
thee.

Here on the mountain must I speak thy ban,—
Thou art condemned in weakness to lie down
And be enshrouded in defenceless sleep,
And to that man shalt thou henceforth belong
To be his bride, his own, his mortal wife,
Who on his way shall find and waken thee!"

Again in horror the Valkyrie cried:

"O Father, stay thy words! Recall thy curse!
Shall this war maiden, godlike child of thine,
Be wasted, withered by a mortal man?
Grim-hearted god, command not this disgrace,
For we, her sisters, share her dreadful shame!"

Promised
Redemp-
tion

Firm spake great Wotan, in majestic tone:
"Did ye not hear what I have now ordained?
From ye, all faithful, shall this faithless go;
No longer shall she ride the stalwart steed,
Sweeping on tempest with your gallant troop.
Her maiden glory like a flower shall fade,
A greedy consort claim her wifely care.
Henceforth a mortal master she obeys,
And by the fireside ever sits and spins,—
A mock and sport to scoffers evermore."

Wailing, Brunnhilda sank upon the ground
Close at his feet, and, with new horror filled,
The rest recoiled. And Wotan sternly spake:
"Fear ye her doom? Then spurn her, deep
accursed!

Draw off from her, and get you far away!
Whoso shall dare to linger at her side,
Or dare to aid her, thus defying me,
Shall for the folly share this direful doom.
So now, ye bold ones, heed ye well my words!
Take yourselves off, and henceforth shun these
peaks!

Come, take my warning! Hasten quick away,
Lest I should hurl my woes upon your heads!"

With cries of woe, the fair Valkyrie rushed
Hither and thither, fleeing to the woods,
While black clouds settled thickly on the cliffs.
Within the woods a rushing whirl was heard,
And as a lightning-flash broke through the
clouds,
There through the storm the wild Valkyrie
swept

Upon their steeds, their bridles loosely flung,—
Swept high in air, close gathered as a troop,
Their armor gleaming in the flashing flame.

Promised
Redemp-
tion

At length the storm had spent its awful rage,
And slow the heavy clouds have crept away;
While evening twilight falls in softest calm,
And soon comes on the soft and tranquil night.

Still at the feet of Wotan, as he stood
In awful silence and majestic gloom,
Brunnhilda lay, prostrate in fear and woe.
At last she slowly raised her tearful eyes,
And saw great Wotan standing in the gloom.
Slowly she knelt before him, soft she spake:
“Was it so shameful—this that I have done—
That my dark deed so shamefully is scourged?
Was it so base—this wrong against thy word—
That thou dost thus debase me utterly?
Was it so lost to honor—this my deed—
That my own honor shall be robbed from me?
O speak, my Father! Look on me, I pray!
Soften thy wrath and curb thy furious hate,
And tell me plain and clear where lies my guilt.
What was the dark and mortal sin I wrought
That doth compel thee with unflinching scorn
To cast away thy true and dearest child?”

Spake Wotan gloomily: “Ask thine own deed—
Itself will show to thee thy mortal guilt.”

And fair Brunnhilda spake most eagerly:
“Thine own decree I sought to carry out!”

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

And Wotan cried: "And did I thus decree
That thou shouldst aid the Volsung in the
fight?"

Response she made: "So didst thou order me
To turn events, as master of the fray."

But Wotan spake: "Yet did I quick reverse
The unavailing order that I gave."

Answered Brunnhilda in all earnestness:
"When Fricka's will did baffle thine own will,
And thou didst let her purpose lead thee on,
Then to thine own true will thou wert most
false."

Bitter spake Wotan: "Ah, full well I know
Thou understandest all my thoughts and
words;
And now because thou knewest me so well
And yet defied me, must I punish thee.
Dost thou esteem me weak and dull in brain?
Forsooth had I no treason to crush out
Then wert thou far too weak for my great
wrath."

Brunnhilda calmly answered as he raged:
"Scanty my wisdom, yet one thing I wist,—
I knew that thou didst love the Volsung well.
I viewed the bitter struggle in thy soul
Which forced thee to forget thy love and wish;
I saw thee forced to make a new decree,—
Although the doing of it grieved thy heart,—
That Siegmund should be shielded never-
more."

And Wotan asked: "Thou knewest this decree,
And yet didst dare to lend to him thy shield?"

Promised
Redemp-
tion

But calm and strong, Brunnhilda answered him:

"Yea, for mine eyes still saw thy deep, true wish,

Which only now thou weakly dost renounce.

'Tis true 't was twisted by a new decree

And held by hampering chains of pain and doubt,

But I who follow Wotan in his wake,

And fare with him in all his deeds of might,

Have seen a thing that his own eyes saw not;

For unto this same Siegmund straight I went.

I told him of his nearing fate of death,

I looked into his eyes and heard his words,

And strongly stirred was I by his distress.

Deep in my heart the hero's woe was heard;

I saw his daring love, his bitterest pain,

I saw his mournful courage, lofty soul.

Mine ears did hear, my wondering eyes did see,

What made my heart with holy fervor beat.

Astounded by the tale I stood ashamed;

Naught could I think but how to serve him best,—

Success or death with Siegmund thus to share.

This only was the lot that I could choose.

Thou who hast made this love within my heart,—

Thou whose true will had sent me to the side

Of this brave Volsung in his dire distress,—

Thou knowest I was true to thy true wish.

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

Thus did I thwart thy false and harsh command."

And Wotan, half relenting, sadly spake:
"Yea, thou didst do what I had longed to do,
Yet by the power of law was I not bound
To leave undone what double fate had urged?
Yea, thinkest thou 't is light work thus to win
The joyful wishes of deep-sorrowing love?
Yea, from the past I know the path of pain,
When in my heart deep-burning woe I bore;
When dire distress my awful rage awoke
(For though a boundless love within me rose
Deep in my tortured heart, it must be hid);
When with my own deep woe and grief I fought
And all my spirits were o'erwhelmed in wrath,
Wasted with longings, with desire consumed.
Then in my soul sprang up the furious wish,
In one great ruin of the whole wide world
To make an end of these eternal woes.
Where wert thou while I struggled deep with
fate?

Forsooth, all sweetly lapped with fair delights
Wert thou, and lightly drank the cup of love
With all the happy ones of boundless bliss.
While I, though god I be, didst slowly drain
Down to the dregs the bitterest cup of gall.
Henceforth thine own bright soul shall lead
thee on,
For thou hast spoken thy release from me.
Henceforth thee must I shun, nor dare I
share

With thee my slightest wish or secret thought.
Apart henceforth,—no more dare we to work

Together as in happy days of yore.
Henceforth so wide apart our life and love
That nevermore shalt thou behold my face,
And nevermore my blessing crown thy life."

Then answered the war maiden pleadingly:
"Yea, little worthy was the foolish maid
Who somehow in confusion by thy words
Did not thy fullest counsel understand,
But only followed what her own heart spake;
For only one thing all her soul resolved,—
To love with all her heart what thou didst love.
Yet now if we must part for evermore,
And thou must tear away thy closest bond,
And cast far off thy faithful other half,
Devoted wholly to thy service true,
Then, O thou god, forget not this, I pray,—
Thine own divine estate do not disown,
Shame not thyself in bringing shame to me.
It is thine own self that is sullied deep
If thou shalt let mine honor be deflowered,
And see me in the mire all scoffed and
scorned."

But Wotan answered in a bitter mood:
"Eager thou wert to follow love's strong lead;
Still follow him whom thou perforce must
love."

But earnestly Brunnhilda pleaded still:
"If from Valhalla I must be shut out
And nevermore give service unto thee,
And if henceforth my honor and my life
Be given to the hands of mortal man,

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

O let me not be clutched as vaunted prize
By some coarse braggart of a coward heart!
O let no worthless wretch come near to me!
Let me be won by none but hero-born!"

But Wotan spake: "From Wotan thou hast
turned,—
He dare not further tamper with thy fate."

A light within her eye, Brunnhilda cried:
"Once thou didst make a noble valiant race,
No coward ever shall debase its blood,—
And well I know the noblest hero yet
Shall from the Volsung line bloom forth in
might!"

Spake Wotan: "Peace! no more thy Volsung
line!
That was all lost when I relinquished thee;
'T was wrecked by that same wrath that thee
o'erwhelmed."

But eagerly Brunnhilda cried again:
"Nay, though I have so grievous crossed thy
will,
I saved the Volsung line from utter doom.
Sieglinga bears, within her, glorious fruit,
And in such pain and woe as ne'er before
Mere mortal woman suffered on this earth
Shall she bring forth the precious babe she
bears."

Great Wotan started, but he grimly spake:
"Yet never must thou seek for aid from me
For this sad mother or her sireless son."

Brunnhilda cried: "She guards the broken sword,—
The sword that thou thyself for Siegmund shaped."

Promised
Redemp-
tion

And Wotan took her words: "The broken sword,—

Yea, though I shaped it for the luckless wight,
Yet 't was myself that sundered it to shreds.

O seek no more my spirit to disturb!

Accept thy fate whatever it may bring;

My word is said,—I cannot change thy doom.

Forth must I fare and hasten far from thee;

Already have I lingered here too long.

From thee I turn as thou didst turn from me.

I do not dare to know what thou dost wish,—

I only know that I must seal thy fate."

Then asked Brunnhilda: "Tell me once again,
What is thy will?"

And solemn he replied:

"Thy doom is this,—I must thy senses seal

In deep and long and all-defenceless sleep;

What man shall find thee thus, a sleeping maid,

Shall wake and make thee, then and there, his
wife."

Falling upon her knees, Brunnhilda cried:

"Shall I be bound in fetters of deep sleep,

To fall as booty unto any wretch

Whose staggering feet shall cross the fatal
spot?

Nay, this one thing thou must allow to me,

Which heavenly fear strong urges as its
right,—

**Promised
Redemp-
tion**

Thou must my sleeping form hedge all around
With horrors that shall hinder the approach,
So that no man except a hero born,
Fearless of heart and dauntless in his might,
Shall dare the terrors and assault the place
And find me sleeping in this mountain hold."

Doubtful looked Wotan. Then he sadly spake:
"Thou beggest overmuch,—too great a boon."

But clinging to his knees, she pleaded long.
"Yea, this one thing, I pray thee, grant to me:
Crush, if thou wilt, thy child that clasps thy
knees,
Trample this faithful heart, destroy this life,
Thrust thy dread spear into her throbbing
breast;
But never, O thou cruel one, consent
To brand me with such woeful curse and
doom,—
Thine own true daughter by a coward shamed.
O I beseech thee wildly, hear my prayer!
At thy command let mighty magic fire
Burst forth and circle me with leaping flames,
That its red tongue may lick with burning zeal,
And its sharp teeth may rend with ruthless ire,
The base intruder who shall dare to come
To ravish from the rock the precious prize."

Then Wotan gazed into her eyes with love,
And with emotion raised her up, and spake:
"Farewell, my child, most brave and beautiful!
Thou life and light of all my heart, farewell!
Pride of my soul, farewell, a long farewell!

Now must I leave thee. Fare thee well, my child!

No more thou ridest forth with me! No more Thou waitest on me at the festal board!

But when I give thee up, my best beloved,
Thou smiling fond delight of all my heart,
I promise that thy couch shall be illumed
By wondrous torches with more brilliant flame
Than ever yet for bridal night were burned.
The flaming glory shall the rock engird,
Its scorching horrors hold all cravens back,
And turn the cowards from Brunnhilda's rock.
He only shall set free the destined bride
Who freer is than I, the law-bound god!"

And at his promise, fair Brunnhilda, touched,
Quick moved to rapture, sought his loving arms,
Throwing herself upon his heaving breast.
Tender and long he held her in farewell;
With trustful heart she looked into his face,
And deep into her eyes he gazed. Then spake
Low soothing words, perchance some old love-
song

That oft he may have sung in days of yore: X

"O EYES so fair and lustrous,
Which oft with love I kissed,
Far sweeter than all glory
Thy loving light, I wist.

Far dearer are the tears that from them pour
Than all the praise of heroes and of war.

"O eyes so soft effulgent
Whose flash my gloom dispels,

And when my heart despaireth,
The better hope foretells,—
When to the world and war I give my life,
Ye turn me oft to nobler, holier strife.

“O eyes so bright and wondrous
On mortals shall ye shine,
But O your tender glory
Shall nevermore be mine!
O now, heart-torn, I take my last sad bliss
And steal away thy godhood with a kiss.”

Softly he kissed her on her closing eyes,
And back she sank unconscious in his arms,
Lost in the magic of a deathlike sleep.
Gently he bore her to a mossy mound
O’ershadowed by a fir-tree spreading wide.
Again he looked in love on her sweet face,
Then closed her helmet visor. Still he gazed
In constant sorrow on her form beloved,
As over it he laid the shining shield,—
The sign and symbol of Valkyrie race.
With footsteps slow, he strode in solemn awe,
Glancing again where fair Brunnhilda lay.
Then to a rocky boulder in the midst
He pointed his dread spear, and slowly breathed
An incantation to the god of fire:

“**L**OKI! Loki!
Listen and heed!
As I found thee at first
In a fiery burst,
And thou fleddest with speed,—
Speed now to me!

“As wavering sprite,
I bound thee fast;
Now again at last
Be thou bound in light.
Heed now to me!

Promised
Redemp-
tion

“Kindle thine ire
Around this fell;
Like a glow of hell
Glower thy fire.
Speed now to me!
Loki! Loki!”

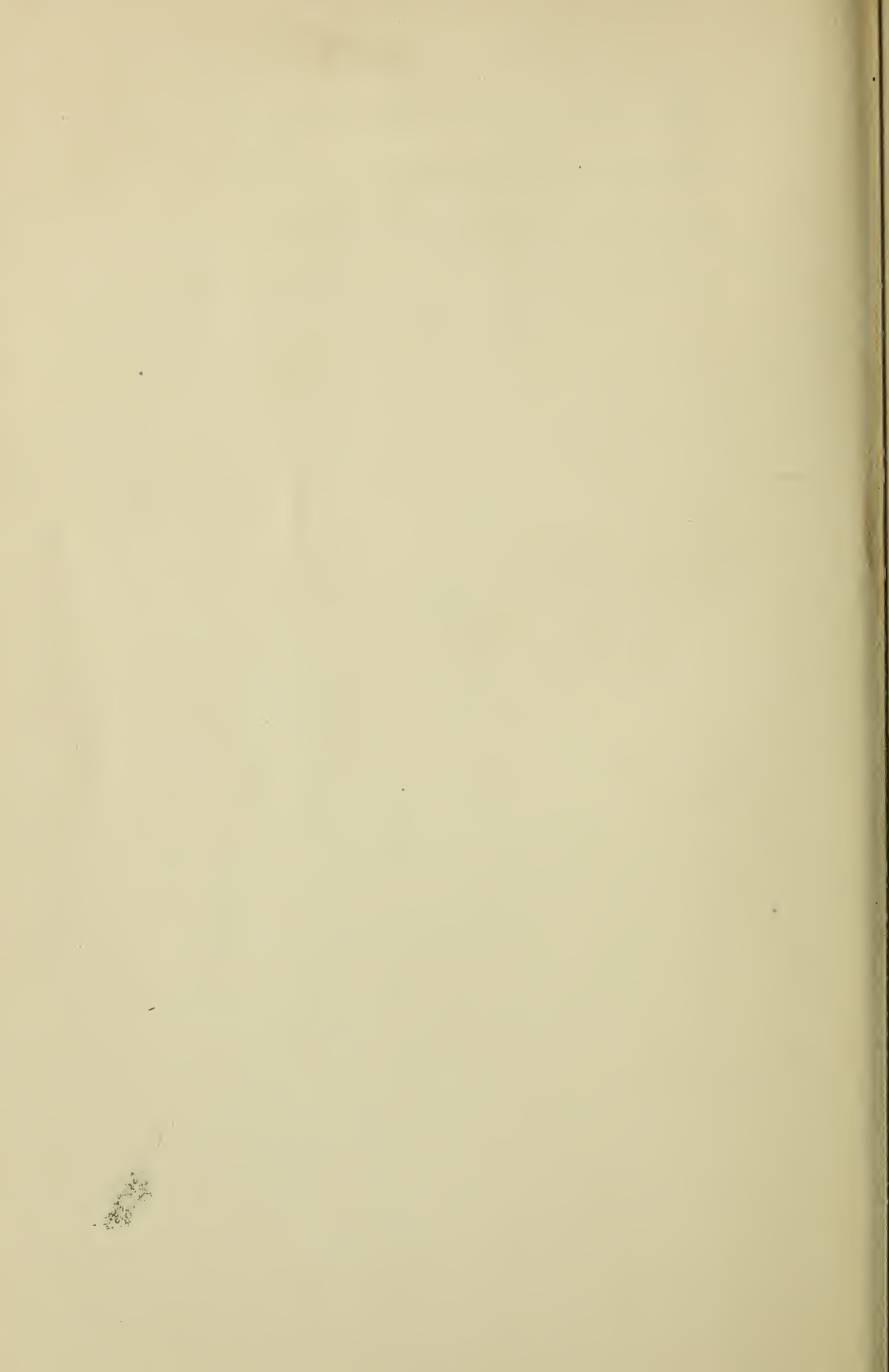
Now as the sound of invocation died,
He struck his spear-point thrice upon the
rock,
And from it burst a stream of liquid fire.
Quickly it broadened to a sea of flame
Which wildly hissed and leaped at Wotan's
feet,
And sang a fiery music as it surged.
With markings of his spear he led it on
Until the fiery flood made a broad stream
Around Brunnhilda's gently sleeping form,—
A flaming barrier on the mountain heights.
Then with the final waving of his spear
To fix the spell, and with a last long look
Of sorrow at the fire-encircled form,
Swiftly he vanished through the forkèd
flames,—
A wondrous music, thrilling, throbbing deep,
A song and surge of sleep and leaping flames,
Flaring like dreams, pursuing like the winds,
Full of a solemn peace, a daring joy!

Promised
Redemp-
tion

So surged the flames around Brunnhilda's
rock,
Flinging a challenge through the ruddy air:

“**W**HOSO dareth Wotan's spear,
Whoso knoweth naught of fear,—
Let him burst these flames of war,
Let him leap this fiery bar!”

THE END



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